

CULTURAL CAPITAL

THE PROBLEM OF LITERARY
CANON FORMATION

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Chapter Two

Mute Inglorious Miltons: Gray, Wordsworth, and the Vernacular Canon

Putting Gray in His Place

Mr. Coleridge (in his *Literary Life*) says, that his friend Mr. Wordsworth had undertaken to show that the language of the *Elegy* is unintelligible: it has, however, been understood!

—HAZLITT, *Lectures on the English Poets*

The preceding chapter argues that there can be no *general* theory of canon formation that would predict or account for the canonization of any particular work, without specifying first the unique historical conditions of that work's production and reception. Neither the social identity of the author nor the work's proclaimed or tacit ideological messages definitively explain canonical status. If this were not true, ideologically heterodox works would never achieve canonicity, nor would writing produced by any member of a socially defined minority. If the literary canon has historically been capable of assimilating enormously heterogeneous productions, that is because the ideological integration of these works has always been the task of the school, not of works themselves. Yet the project of replacing the current critique of the canon with something like a sociology of writing and reading raises an interesting question about the actual relation between the ideological contents of particular literary works and the immediate historical circumstances of their canonization. I should like to begin answering this question by considering at some length a canonical work, Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard*, whose ideological resonance has always been perceived as related in an especially intimate way to its canonicity.

The example of Gray's *Elegy* is offered here with the additional purpose of magnifying a cross section from the historical sketch concluding Chap-

ter 1, the moment at which the vernacular English canon enters the school system as a literary curriculum in competition with the classical curriculum. While Gray's *Elegy* is indisputably a monument, in Empson's well-known reading of the poem, of "bourgeois ideology," that ideology does not in itself account for the poem's canonicity, its utility in a syllabus of English literature. As soon as we understand canonicity as a form of cultural capital, we recognize that whatever agreeable messages may have been derived from the poem by its initial readers (and these messages were by no means unambiguous), it also circulated as capital in at least two senses: First as *property*, in both the literal sense of its commodity status (it made considerable money for its publisher), and in the extended sense of its accessibility only to those who already possessed a certain quantum of cultural capital (specifically, vernacular literacy). And second, as *linguistic capital*, as the means by which that literacy was produced in the schools. There is much evidence to suggest that Gray's *Elegy* accrued enormous capital of the latter sort, since it rapidly established itself in the school system as a perfect poem for introducing schoolchildren to the study of English literature. Of what does this perfection consist? Not, I will argue, primarily or only its perceived ideology, for this ideology does not operate independently of other more "formal" aspects of the poem. It is rather in the relation between what the poem means and what it formally embodies that we may understand its canonical position.

We may twist and turn the poem as we wish, then, examining each facet of its ideology, and we will not grasp its canonical essence. Yet surely the most curious aspect of the poem's canonical status is that the *Elegy* sets out what looks very like a problematic of canon formation in its reflection on the "mute, inglorious Milton," or the undiscovered "gem of purest ray serene"—both phrases which raise the issue of *literacy*. I will return periodically to the example of Gray's gem in order to look more closely at that scenario in which one imagines the literary productions of the unlettered as having the status of the gem in its underwater cavern, precisely what in our discourse is called the "noncanonical." Such works are supposed to exist in a realm in which they do not circulate but nevertheless have value, a kind of *unvalued* value. In the case of the gem itself, its value in a real-world economy is constituted as a relation between its social production as a gem—the fact that it is not found but *sought*—and its material properties. These relations are complex enough for the gem, but even more so for a literary text, whose material properties are nothing other than properties of pure signification. Here we can begin to speak about the relation of a particular work to the actual desire of its author for canonical status: This relation includes not only the poem's intertextual relations with other canonical

poems, its situatedness in an always retroactively constructed tradition, but its relation to the entire linguistic/institutional field within which the form of the canon appears as both the space of the work and its time, past and future. For Gray's *Elegy* that context is, I will show, the space and time of vernacular literacy as that form of literacy is produced by the institutionalization of the vernacular canon in the primary schools of the eighteenth century. Wordsworth's meditation on certain issues raised by Gray's position in the vernacular canon will provide a retrospect on the moment of that canon's institutionalization and, more broadly, on the emergence of "literature" as the discursive category devised to accommodate vernacular works in the schools.

In order to locate the poem in the precise social/institutional context of its production and reception, we will first have to describe as exhaustively as possible the relation between the poem's formal characteristics and the institutional conditions which both enable its composition and select it as the perfect text for reproduction in teaching anthologies. These conditions are as follows.

A compositional matrix. The most striking formal feature of Gray's poem has always been acknowledged as the density of its intertextuality; its phrases sound familiar even in the absence of identified pretexts, as though it were the anonymous distillation of literary sententiae. It may no longer be possible now to distinguish this effect from the effect of the poem's recitation or memorization in the classroom, since the *Elegy* has been adopted as such a school text for nearly two centuries. Leslie Stephen could remark casually in his 1909 study, "Gray and his School": "Everyone knows his [Gray's] poetry by heart. The *Elegy* has so worked itself into the popular imagination that it includes more familiar phrases than any poem of equal length in the language."¹ That this impression of familiarity even upon first reading is by no means simple is confirmed by the slightly reserved praise of nineteenth-century critics for the insinuated inevitability of the poem; thus Edmund Gosse in 1882: "The *Elegy* may almost be looked upon as the typical piece of English verse, our poem of poems, not that it is the most brilliant or original or profound lyric in our language, but because it combines in more balanced perfection than any other all the qualities that go into the production of a poetical effect."² The total impression of an immediate but sophisticated accessibility locates the poem within a literary culture which may very well now be based upon an anthology of literary clichés available to every minimally educated reader (a trivial "cultural literacy"),³ but which in Gray's own time was equally likely to consist in the use of an actual text known as the "commonplace book," a text uniquely both public and private. It is this text which functions as the matrix of com-

position, as the base over which the locodescriptive or topographical lyric, the pastoral, the elegiac, are laid in successive veneers. By looking closely at this matrix of compositional practice, we can begin to characterize the conditions of production specific to Gray's poem.

Gray compiled three folio commonplace books in his lifetime, within which he transcribed and translated quotations, as well as drafts of his own poetry, including the *Elegy*.⁴ Wordsworth's complaint that "Gray wrote English verses as his brother Eton schoolboys wrote Latin, filching a phrase now from one author and now from another"⁵ is an accurate characterization of a compositional process mediated by a text whose dual status as a means of both producing and consuming texts is now all but forgotten. The practice of keeping a commonplace book translated into a *writing* practice the classical rhetor's mnemonic technique of finding (*inventio*) the "topic" or "line of argument" (*locus communis*) appropriate to a given performative occasion. These performances of classical rhetoric were both oral and public. In the early modern period, the motive of public persuasion that accompanied rhetorical practice began to recede (very slowly at first) with the successful dissemination in the sixteenth century of works such as Erasmus's *De Copia*, which adapted the stylistic norms of rhetoric to written production. Hence Erasmus's specific pedagogic injunction that schoolchildren "have paper books ready" within which to record selected passages from their reading.⁶ These transcriptions insured the memorability of chosen passages, in whatever context of recollection, and hence the transformation of "topics" into the modern conception of indexical categories of any sort. In 1706, Locke published "A New Method of a Common-Place Book" organized around just this indexical, or nonrhetorical, principle; evidently Gray followed Locke's plan in organizing his own folio volumes. Nevertheless it would be incorrect to detect in this historical sequence the disappearance of the persuasive motive, which lingers in the very conception of "commonplace," that is, truths generally believed. If Gray's *Elegy* is indeed composed in much the same manner as a commonplace book, its "sententiousness" takes the strictly Aristotelian form of the enthymeme, or rhetorical syllogism, an abbreviated logic negotiating a move from the general proposition to the particular, specifically from the assertion of a universal mortality to a deduction of the individual's (the speaker's). The doubling back of the rhetorical motive upon what might be called a purely anthological principle marks the point at which the "commonplace" itself becomes synonymous with banality, or mere truism. One might speculate also that the commonplace book had to be discarded as a matrix of composition in order for the Romantic locodescriptive lyric to set itself against the rhetorical commonplace, or to resist the compositional methods of eighteenth-century poetry.

But the confusion of the rhetorical and the anthological motives is in fact even more complex and interesting, as it is without question the locodescriptive poem—the generic matrix of so much Romantic lyric—that engages the semantic ambiguity of the *topos*, which was perhaps even in Aristotle an unstable sliding between a "place" in the visual memory and in a text. The locodescriptive poem literalizes the metaphor of place as an organizational principle of composition. From its very inception it exhibited a tendency toward digressive, generalized reflection which exceeded the didacticism of the georgic, upon which it was probably founded, and thus required a new generic designation. Johnson calls this new form "local poetry" in his *Life of Denham*:

Cooper's Hill is the work that confers upon him the rank and dignity of an original author. He seems to have been, at least among us, the author of a species of composition that may be denominated *local poetry*, of which the fundamental subject is some particular landscape to be poetically described, with the addition of such embellishments as may be supplied by historical retrospection or incidental meditation.⁷

The possibility of dullness or banality inherent in this generic project is only the complement of the pleasure arising from expatiation upon the commonplace. We may discern, then, in the evidence of the *Elegy's* composition the conditions of its production in the refunctioning of the commonplace book, which is at base an instrumentality of the early modern school.

A *generic matrix*. The nexus of textual/institutional relations privileging the sententious within locodescriptive poetry must then be set within a larger historical conjuncture which sees the emergence of "landscape" as a value in the cultural-aesthetic domain. The career of such landscape gardeners or estate planners as Capability Brown depends upon the same social valuation of "landscape" one finds in the painting and locodescriptive poetry of the period (the ubiquitous recourse to views, prospects, and the like), but equally fundamentally upon the transformation of the traditional "common" into private property as a result of a long process of what was described at the time as agricultural "improvement."⁸ The invisible grid of property makes possible the reconstruction of the land as "landscape." The social significance of this concept has been superbly analyzed by John Barrell in connection with Thomson's *Seasons*, where the key landscape descriptions drive toward the representation of the national social order as a harmonious totality. In Barrell's analysis, it is crucial that this totalizing impulse can be indulged only by depopulating the "landscape," by reducing the laboring many, as in this passage from Thomson's "Spring," to a metonymic sign, the "smoke" of the villages on the horizon (the same sign

reappears in the depopulated landscape of Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey"):

Meantime you gain the height, from whose fair brow
The bursting prospect spreads immense around;
And, snatched o'er hill and dale, and wood and lawn,
And verdant field, and darkening heath between,
And villages embosomed soft in trees,
And spiry towns by surging columns marked
Of household smoke, your eye excursive roams—
Wide-stretching from the Hall whose kind haunt
The hospitable Genius lingers still,
To where the broken landscape, by degrees
Ascending, roughens into rigid hills. . . .

"Spring," 950–60⁹

Barrell comments: "It is of course particularly easy to see a vast prospect as a harmonious composition, if in its foreground is a landscaped park designed to organize the world beyond it into a pictorial unity from a carefully chosen station."¹⁰ Lord Lytton, the gentleman addressed in Thomson's lines, views the national order from Hagley Park: everything beyond the park is shrunk by means of perspective to the margin of his property. This effect might be described briefly, if not redundantly, as the landscape topos, a totalizing pictorial representation that permits the return of the rhetorical commonplace, with its agenda of persuasion, by appeal to common truth or common sense. The landscape topos is just where Gray begins, with a landscape that modulates or "fades" into a reflection on the entire social order: "Now fades the glimmering landscape on the sight." And in Gray, as in Thomson, the very expatiatory possibilities of this generic matrix allow reflection on the nation's literature, indeed provide the occasion for a reflection on that literature as *national*.¹¹

A linguistic matrix: When Johnson comes to praise the *Elegy*, he locates its power precisely in the evocation of the "common," and the language of his panegyric thus functions as symptomatic discourse, as a commentary on the text-milieu-itself:

In the character of his *Elegy* I rejoice to concur with the common reader; for by the common sense of readers uncorrupted with literary prejudices, after all the refinements of subtily and the dogmatism of learning must finally be decided all claim to poetical honours. The *Church-yard* abounds with images which find a mirrour in every mind, and with sentiments to which every bosom returns an echo. The four stanzas beginning

"Yet e'en these bones" are to me original: I have never seen the notions in any other place; yet he that reads them here persuades himself that he has always felt them. Had Gray written often thus it had been vain to blame, and useless to praise him. (II, 441)

The poem Johnson describes seems to be uttered by the *Zeitgeist*, as though it were the consummate expression of a social consensus. This is not to say, however, that the social totality merely speaks its own truth through Gray (or Johnson). The *Elegy* does not abound with images which find a mirror in every mind. Johnson has already eliminated from his consensus everyone who will not read the poem because he or she cannot read. What is the relation then between "every mind" and the "common reader"? The claim to a "common sense" embraces everyone in the same way that everyone is embraced by a mortal fate. The instancing of a universal fate is the ground of a claim to a universal truth that does not even allow of an "original" thought unless that thought can be experienced at the same time as "always felt." This paradox has been subjected to the sharpest critique by Empson in his now unavoidable sentences on the "massive calm" and "complacency" of the poem: "The truism of the reflections in the church-yard, the universality and impersonality this gives to the style, claim as if by comparison that we ought to accept the injustice of society as we do the inevitability of death."¹² But if both Empson and Johnson describe *avant la lettre* what Althusserian ideology-critique calls "interpellation," the hailing of the subject,¹³ this process has only very little to do with the truth of the commonplaces themselves—which are indeed nothing but banalities—and everything to do with the "style," with the peculiar force of banalities expressed in a specific linguistic form.

The tradition of Romantic criticism has been suspicious enough of the commonplaces to wonder at the source of their power, and even to trouble itself about the value of a truth which anyone might possess (Gray himself was contemptuous of the *Elegy's* popularity, for reasons to be considered later). I. A. Richards, whose theoretical apparatus was mobilized to a high degree of readiness against banality of all sorts, exempts Gray's *Elegy* from this charge on the ground of its successful "tone," which he defines as "a perfect recognition of the writer's relation to the reader." Gray's flawless staging of this conspiracy compels Richards to repeat the very terms of Johnson's praise, doubly symptomatic now for the defensiveness of the rhetoric:

Gray's *Elegy*, indeed, might stand as a supreme instance to show how powerful an exquisitely adjusted tone may be. It would be difficult to maintain that the thought in this poem is

striking or original, or that its feeling is exceptional. It embodies a sequence of reflections and attitudes that under similar conditions arise readily in any contemplative mind. Their character as commonplaces, needless to say, does not make them any less important, and the *Elegy* may usefully remind us that boldness and originality are not necessities for great poetry.¹⁴

A footnote adds to this statement a small quibble with Johnson, denying the originality of the lines beginning "yet e'en these bones." In fact it is important for Richards to deny any originality at all to the poem in order to make the strongest possible argument for its overcoming of banality by exquisiteness of tone. But it is hard to see how this argument has not been anticipated by Johnson's gesture of merely joining a unanimous and harmonious chorus, to which indeed he already belonged. This chorus cannot be reduced to the company of "any contemplative mind"; nor can it be expanded to include everyone who would agree that "the paths of glory lead but to the grave" (presumably everyone). On the contrary, Johnson has already identified the social locus of "common sense" in the "common reader." If the question of tone concerns the relation of writer to reader, that relation is defined not solely by the exchange of commonplaces but, in Empson's words, as an effect of "complacency," that is, a species of pleasure. It is against this pleasure that Empson reacts with "irritation," the precisely antithetical affect ("Many people have been irritated . . . by the complacency . . .").

The affect of complacency is produced, as Empson rightly argues, by the relation of the commonplace as such—the continuous quotation from the rhetorical/anthological commonplace book of eighteenth-century literary culture—to the "universality and impersonality" of the style. I would like to propose that this style is produced by the *systematic linguistic normalization of quotation*, a compositional method of translation, decontextualization, and grammatical revision. By this means both classical literary works and older works of English literature are absorbed into the poem in a linguistically homogeneous form, the proto-"Standard English" of mid-eighteenth-century England. Linguistic normalization is not invented by Gray but "supremely instanced" by his poem. The cento of quotable quotations which *is* the poem thus generates a reception-scenario characterized by the reader's pleased recognition that "this is my truth," while at the same time concealing the fact that this pleasure is founded upon the subliminal recognition that "this is my language." Johnson's images of "mirror" and "echo" accurately track the sequence of these recognitions. The pleasure elicited by them is undoubtedly narcissistic, but it is not the

pleasure of an individual's recognition of his or her individuality; rather it takes the form of identification with a social body expressed or embodied in the common possession of writer and reader, a common language.

Carrière ouverte aux talents

The *Elegy* is not concerned with protest against or acquiescence in contemporary social conditions. Gray simply sets down the social facts, which are subsumed under the more important question of individual fulfillment.

—FRANK BRADY, "Gray's *Elegy*: Structure and Meaning"¹⁵

The foregrounding of the question of language does not at all relieve one of having to read the poem, of determining the relation of linguistic normalization to what the poem "says." Such a foregrounding is only the premise of a correct reading of this relation, as well as a correct reading of the many interpretations of the poem that manage to bracket its apparent social critique. For example, the "complacency" of the above quotation may be taken merely to reproduce the poem's supposed ideology, but it also usefully exemplifies the work of pedagogy by which the historical specificity of the poem is canceled and rewritten as the *universal* problem of the *individual*. Such a reading is interesting just because it raises a question it cannot answer: What is "individual fulfillment" apart from certain social conditions? How would it be experienced or recognized? The question of what the poem actually says about the social inequality of the class structure is on the other hand not at all easy to answer. I would like to argue that this is really a question of what the class structure signifies in the poem and not what signifies class structure in the poem. The poem actively reflects upon this structure and does not merely reflect it.

The latter point is what Empson brings out in reading the famous "gem" stanza; the distinction between the rich and the poor does not signify immediately a historically specific class structure—the rich and the poor have always been with us—but rather a problem of *social mobility*, which is in turn specific to a certain historical class structure. It is only in the context of problematizing the possibility of movement between classes that Gray's characteristic strategies of ironizing wealth or power under the shadow of death, or granting to poverty a noble pathos, become intelligible; and it is in this context that we must read Empson's remarks:

Gray's *Elegy* is an odd case of poetry with latent political ideas: [quotes "Full many a gem . . ."] What this means, as the context makes clear, is that eighteenth-century England had no scholarship system or *carrière ouverte aux talents*. This is

stated as pathetic, but the reader is put into a mood in which one would not try to alter it. (It is true that Gray's society, unlike a possible machine society, was necessarily based on manual labour, but it might have used a man of special ability wherever he was born.) By comparing the social arrangement to Nature he makes it seem inevitable, which it was not, and gives it a dignity which was undeserved. Furthermore, a gem does not mind being in a cave and a flower prefers not to be picked; we feel that the man is like the flower, as short-lived, natural, and valuable, and this tricks us into feeling that he is better off without opportunities. The sexual suggestion of *blush* brings in the Christian idea that virginity is good in itself, and so that any renunciation is good; this may trick us into feeling it is lucky for the poor man that society keeps him unspotted from the World. The tone of melancholy claims that the poet understands the considerations opposed to aristocracy, though he judges against them; the truism of the reflections in the church yard, the universality and impersonality this gives to the style, claim as if by comparison that we ought to accept the injustice of society as we do the inevitability of death.

Many people, without being communists, have been irritated by the complacency in the massive calm of the poem, and this seems partly because they feel there is a cheat in the implied politics; the "bourgeois" themselves do not like literature to have too much "bourgeois ideology." (4-5)

These sentences still stand in my view against all the refutations of them because they set against Gray's pathos an equally powerful performance of Enlightenment reason. The elements of the pathos seem not to survive this analysis. And yet the wasting of human potential, in Empson's own words, "cannot but be felt deeply," and indeed this pathos is the motive of Empson's critique of Gray. Empson claims both that there is too much "bourgeois ideology" in Gray's poem, and that "all the great poetic statements [of the wastage of human powers] are in a way 'bourgeois,'" a contradiction that sets up his striking translation of the "gem" stanza into an explicit statement about the absence of any institutional structure facilitating social mobility. What this stanza means is "that eighteenth-century England had no scholarship system or *carrière ouverte aux talents*." But in fact, as historians have amply demonstrated, there was a much greater degree of social mobility in mid-eighteenth-century England than in the caste

or "estate" system of feudalism, or in the transitional early modern period.¹⁶ The fact of increased upward mobility is at once the premise of "bourgeois ideology"—that anyone can succeed—and its prime source of social anxiety. Hence the continuous appropriation by the bourgeoisie of aristocratic caste traits, precisely in order to reinforce and stabilize a class structure founded upon a necessary degree of instability or fluidity. Needless to say, this functional instability of social hierarchy requires complex practical and discursive strategies in order to maintain the structure as a whole; there must be neither too little nor too much social mobility. In the same way, mobility must be valued neither too little nor too much. The narrative scenario in which Gray imagines what the illiterate peasant might have been (the unfound gem) valorizes the process of social mobility as *circulation* per se: What cannot move (up) is waste, and waste is at the same time the necessary *cost* of circulation: every success is at the expense of another's failure.¹⁷

In this context the fact that Empson implicitly identifies a particular institution—the school—as the site at which social mobility is choked off is a perversely brilliant intuition. Contemporary eighteenth-century guardians of class structure were worried about just those mobilizing and possibly destabilizing effects of education, and as a consequence they were likely to argue that the availability of knowledge had to be actively restricted. In the previous century Locke had suggested that the children of the poor should not be taught to read at all, and this opinion was more or less the consensus of educated social commentators.¹⁸ In 1757 Soam Jenyns remarks typically that ignorance is a "cordial, administered by the gracious hand of providence, of which [the poor] ought never to be deprived by an ill-judged and improper education."¹⁹ Not until the later eighteenth and early nineteenth century were the poor provided in any numbers with the means to acquire literacy, and then primarily as an adjunct to the disciplining of their everyday life (the program, for example, of the Society for the Promotion of Christian Knowledge, or of the new "monitorial" systems of basic education).²⁰ If knowledge is a real form of property or wealth, it is difficult to see how this property can come to be possessed by the endemically impoverished, how indeed a "mute, inglorious Milton" can ever come to write, for better or worse. Clearly the question of social mobility, as it is raised by access to knowledge, does not refer to the poor at all, except as they represent *in extremis* a condition of deprivation that is in fact *relative* for certain other social groups. Only those in possession of some capital are in a position to acquire the knowledge that in turn signifies the at once attractive and dangerous possibility of

upward mobility, even if this mobility is essentially enacted in the realm of the imaginary, as the imitation of upper-class behavior or educated manners, that is, as social *emulation*.

Here we may return to Bourdieu's concept of "cultural capital" in order to identify the motive force behind a variety of developments that traverse the market, the class structure, and literary discourses. These are: the wider availability of vernacular printed matter, particularly subscription series such as the *Spectator*; the establishment of quasi-educational bodies such as the literary clubs, the coffeehouses, and the lending libraries; and the rise of for-profit grammar schools and vocational academies designed specifically for the commercial classes.²¹ In these latter schools, not only professional knowledges such as accounting and surveying are disseminated. Traditional knowledges—of classical languages and literatures—are also disseminated as the sign of acquired rather than inherited capital, and as a means of exhibiting status. Such social emulation expresses itself not as antagonism between classes but as the bourgeois embrace of aristocratic culture, the complement of that commercialization of the nobility by which their revenues came to be invested more and more in capitalist agriculture or trade. As soon as we look at the educational sites of social emulation, we note that the curricular form of this emulation is marked by the clear distinction of "polite letters," of linguistic knowledges, from the nascent discourses of natural philosophy, pure or applied. This distinction, which would have been meaningless in the medieval university, emerges clearly in the seventeenth century with Locke's well-known critique of the Latin curriculum, which recognizes emulation as nothing more than pretension: "Can there be anything more ridiculous, than that a Father should waste his own Money, and his Son's time, in setting him to learn the Roman Language; when at the same time he designs for him a Trade, wherein he having no use of Latin, fails not to forget that little which he brought from School."²² But Locke goes on to concede that a knowledge of Latin is of course the endowment of every gentleman. The vocational academies of the eighteenth century follow Locke's utilitarian principle in offering new courses in skills needful for various forms of commerce, and their rise is paralleled by a decline in the quality of the grammar schools, which had been vital institutions for disseminating classical literacy in the preceding two centuries, along with a certain ossification of university curricula accessible for the most part to the bored progeny of noble families.²³

Two consequences follow from these curricular developments: First, the position of the classical languages, as the knowledge provided by the traditional curriculum, changes; but this knowledge does not suffer in the end a simple derogation in status. On the contrary, since the children of gentle-

men continue to be educated in the traditional classical languages, their "useless" knowledge comes to stand by the later eighteenth century as a pure sign of their noble status.²⁴ Second, there is installed in the "middling" and commercial classes, as the upwardly mobile classes, a linguistic ambivalence which takes the form of suspicion toward the classical languages as useless knowledge, and envy of the social distinction they represent.²⁵ This ambivalence, as we shall see, is ultimately resolved with the entry of vernacular literature into the new, middle-class schools. The study of vernacular literature is thus at first a substitute for the study of Greek and Latin, but with the same object of producing a linguistic sign of social distinction, a distinctive language.

If it is not yet possible to say that in the later seventeenth or early eighteenth century this language is a bourgeois language—what we now call Standard English—that is because it has as yet only a limited dissemination. In the last chapter we observed it thrust itself above the sea of dialects first as the vernacular *Hochsprache* of the court nobility, who use it both as an administrative and as a literary language. But Standard English is a national language *derived* from its literary precursors, a complex derivation that requires the active intervention of institutional agencies. Once it has appeared, the literary language must be consciously and systematically *transformed* in order to regularize its distinctive differences from regional dialects; hence the production in the later seventeenth century of vernacular grammars, dictionaries, and rhetoric handbooks which are disseminated in the wider literary culture even more than in the schools. If England did not establish, as did France, an "academy" to lay down the linguistic law, it did develop an array of quasi-academic institutions within which the continuous correction of speech was undertaken—the coffeehouses, literary clubs, and salons.

The thematization of vernacular "polite" language so conspicuous in the writing of Swift, Addison, Johnson, and many others, is premised, as I argued in Chapter 1, on a fetishization of grammar, that is, a reduction of the stylistic norms of the courtly *Hochsprache* to an iterable system of rules. This fetishizing is duly if also anxiously expressed in literary culture as the project of correcting Renaissance English.²⁶ In his survey of neo-classical attempts at linguistic regularization, John Barrell usefully reminds us that the revolutionary effects of this agenda were dissimulated by the fact that "proper" or correct English was still conceptualized from the perspective of the gentleman: "The gentleman . . . was believed to be the only member of society who spoke a language universally intelligible; his usage was 'common,' in the sense of being neither a local dialect nor infected by the terms of any particular art."²⁷ Nonetheless the impetus behind the

standardization of speech does not come from the landed nobility but from a much wider and more heterogeneous group, which is beginning to recognize itself not as other than aristocratic but as part of a society of "gentlemen," defined according to norms of behavior and education rather than blood: "For well before the 1730s it is clear that, though the gentleman may survive as the ideal of a comprehensive observer, he is no longer easily identifiable with any very considerable body of men within the society of England."²⁸ At a later point Barrell argues that this redefinition of the gentleman tends to erase the difference between the gentleman and the author who arrogates to himself both the power to define gentility and the power to legislate the norms of polite speech. Even if proper English is referred to the idea of the gentleman, then, Barrell's analysis confirms Auerbach's parallel argument that the site of linguistic regularization moves decisively from the court to the city (hence "polite" speech). One may wonder why the bourgeoisie does not recognize itself as the agency of transformation, but Auerbach's concept of cultural homogenization suggests why such a recognition is not possible: The acquisition of polite speech evidently cannot be the medium of class consciousness so long as this speech is defined by reference to the "gentleman." True class consciousness does not come to the bourgeoisie through polite speech until that speech is fully representable as a national language, that is, as a language actually spoken throughout the nation-state. Clearly this is not the case in the earlier eighteenth century, nor is this project capable of realization until the educational system is readapted to disseminate this speech. The interconnection of linguistic and nationalistic agendas has been interestingly examined in Benedict Anderson's study of nationalism, *Imagined Communities*, the following passage of which will stand as a summary overview of the largest historical context of the present argument:

The relatively small size of traditional aristocracies, their fixed political bases, and the personalization of political relations implied by sexual intercourse and inheritance, meant that their cohesions as classes were as much concrete as imagined. An illiterate nobility could still act as a nobility. But the bourgeoisie? Here was a class which, figuratively speaking, came into being as a class only in so many replications. Factory-owner in Lille was connected to factory-owner in Lyon only by reverberation. They had no necessary reason to know of one another's existence; they did not typically marry each other's daughters or inherit each other's property. But they did come to visualize in a general way the existence of thousands and thousands like themselves through print-language. For an illiterate bour-

geoisie is scarcely imaginable. Thus in world-historical terms, bourgeoisies were the first class to achieve solidarities on an essentially imagined basis.²⁹

Anderson goes on to suggest that such an imagined community necessarily had a natural limit in the extent of the vernacular language, and if this is so, the bourgeoisie comes to know itself not as an international class but as the nation itself, as the speakers of a national language. Until that imagined community comes to be, the "polite language" of earlier eighteenth-century literary culture continues to embody a *confusion* of aristocratic and bourgeois cultural norms, and an *ambivalence* in the relation of vernacular to classical literacy.

The trajectory sketched here is intended to make sense of one moment in that history of literary canon formation to which Gray's *Elegy* belongs, and which is nothing other than the field of institutional/linguistic forces conditioning both the production and the reception of his poem. This moment is virtually the last moment at which literary culture can sustain a discourse of polite letters in the vernacular without establishing this discourse in the schools. And it is virtually the last moment at which polite speech can easily be assimilated to the concept of the gentleman as aristocrat, and therefore to a class structure simply divided into aristocracy and commons. It is this class structure which appears in Gray's *Elegy*, not as a representation of the social order but as a generic anachronism—the pastoral; hence we are enjoined to ask what this structure signifies as an anachronism. William Temple characterized Gray himself in a letter to Boswell as just such a living anachronism: "he could not bear to be considered himself merely as a man of letters; and though without birth, or fortune, or station, his desire was to be looked upon as a private independent gentleman, who read for his amusement."³⁰ This biographical datum is a very relevant consideration, because Gray inserts himself into the *Elegy* as a figure just like the idle aristocrat in pastoral disguise, a surprisingly belated performance of what Empson calls the "trick" of Renaissance pastoral. Of course the gentleman who is quite out of place indulging his pastoral melancholy in the company of peasants happens to be, like Milton, the son of a scrivener. There is perhaps no better example of Barrell's point that the boundary between gentleman and author is effaced when "men of letters" arrogate to themselves the discourse of gentility. To this point I shall return. At present, I would like to place under greater magnification the event (in the 1740s and 1750s) which transforms English literary culture: the passage of English vernacular texts into the schools. Gray's *Elegy* bears a necessary if also an oblique relation to this event.

There was, to be sure, a discourse of canon formation within English

literary culture prior to the 1750s. The important fact about this discourse is that it circulates outside the curriculum of the Latin schools but in a *mirror relation* to that curriculum. This point has not been sufficiently appreciated; it is why such poets as Denham and Waller could for so long enjoy reputations they could not sustain after English literature began to be taught in the schools. The teaching of vernacular literature meant the beginning of the end of this neoclassical hegemony, the end of a strict conformity of the English canonical form to the norms of Latin classicism. This development is the long-term consequence of an ultimate enabling cause: the 1662 Act of Uniformity, which excluded non-Anglicans from teaching in the grammar schools and universities. The Dissenting Academies which emerged as a result of that act initially merely reproduced for their constituencies the curriculum of the traditional schools, but this imitation clearly did not provide the cultural capital most desired by the "middling" sort—the commercial and professional classes who were most likely to be Dissenters in the first place. The decades-long campaign to replace Latin with vernacular texts had doubtless many determinants, but we might describe the particular moment under scrutiny as the temporary victory of linguistic ambivalence over social emulation. Just as the late medieval nobility acquired literacy but did not care to master the scholastic canon of the clergy, the middling sort wished to acquire polite speech but not necessarily a knowledge of Latin or Greek. In this way a *difference* from the aristocracy was preserved within the gradual process of cultural homogenization; and this difference expressed both a resentment against exclusions based upon class and religious belief, and a canny recognition that the dissemination of polite speech provided a cultural basis for the *dispersion* of political power. Hence the program to vernacularize the curriculum became urgent by mid-century, the subject of intense controversy. By the time that Thomas Sheridan wrote his important polemic, *British Education: Or the Source of the Disorders of Great Britain* (1756), the connection between vernacular linguistic refinement and a progressive political agenda was firmly entrenched, and took the pedagogic form in the dissenting academies of a revival of "political oratory," or rhetoric. It was in the context of a rhetorical program whose ends are also easily recognizable as nationalistic that Sheridan, like many others, urged a syllabus of English literature:

. . . as models of style, Milton in the poetic, and Shakespeare in the dramatic, Swift, Addison, Dryden, and Sir William Temple (in some of his works) in prose, may be considered as truly classical, as the Virgil, Caesar, Tully, and Sallust of the Romans; nor is there any reason that they should not be handed down as such equally to the end of time. . . . And shall we not endeavor to

secure to future generations, entire and unchanged, their birthright in Milton, in Addison, and Swift? Or shall we put in the power of one giddy and profuse age to dissipate, or render of no value, the heaps of treasure now collected in the many excellent books written by English authors?³¹

The anxiety expressed by Sheridan is that, in the absence of an institutional form of dissemination, literary culture cannot be entrusted to preserve English works of the past; vernacular works must be revalued as equal in value to classical works and therefore worthy to be taught in the schools. This is the crucial point: the judgment of vernacular works throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries already elevates some works over others, but only the institutionalization of these works as a *curriculum* can revalue their cultural capital as the equal of the classics.

The introduction of these works into school curricula exceeds the objective of instituting grammatical speech as a credential of gentility and discovers in this canonical form the paradigm of another linguistic practice, the rhetorical or the "elocutionary," which, as we shall see, functions as a claim to political entitlement on the part of those who are not gentle by birth.³² An account of the elocutionary use of vernacular literature in the classroom of a dissenting academy is recorded in *The Monthly Repository*, volume 8, which describes the technique of Dr. John Aiken of Warrington Academy, perhaps the leading academy of the age (Joseph Priestly taught there):

After the exercises [practical sermons] were examined he would generally turn to some of the finest passages of the English poets, Milton, Pope, Thomson, Young, and Akenside, and having first himself read a considerable portion . . . he heard each of the students read, pointed out their defects and the proper mode of remedying them. This lecture was often the most satisfactory and improving of any in the whole course.³³

Early vernacular anthologies such as William Enfield's frequently reprinted *The Speaker* (1774), the Adamic ancestor of the Norton anthologies, were thus organized for use in the classroom as texts for elocution practice.³⁴ *The Speaker*, which was used in Warrington Academy, opens with an essay on elocution and goes on to reproduce a recognizably modern selection of English literary texts, notably different from the Norton Anthology perhaps only for a greater selection of minor mid-century writers and the relative absence of those Restoration poets whose language was paradigmatic for the polite speech of the earlier eighteenth century. There appeared then, within and in some sense also against, the *sermo urbanus* of the

“gentleman” a different linguistic practice, different but also the same. The difference roughly corresponds to the major political divisions of the century—between Tory and Whig—but these are divisions between parties whose common basis of power was always property. Even if the middle-class academies disseminated a form of cultural capital from which certain strata of this class had been excluded by the traditional schools, that dissemination ceased at the border of property. In cultural terms, this border marked the division between the literate and the illiterate.

Here it is possible to begin reading Gray’s poem in its proper place, the place it occupies in the field of institutional/linguistic forces. At present this reading attempts nothing more than a general description: the generic form of pastoral simplifies the social structure by reducing it to the Renaissance status-hierarchy of aristocracy and peasantry. The poem’s representation of such a structure facilitates an act of social emulation by which Gray inserts himself into his poem as a pseudo-aristocrat. But this elitism is also contradicted by Gray’s own avowedly Whig sentiments, which are expressed in his fragment. “The Alliance of Education and Government.” There he speculates seriously on what we would call the distribution of cultural capital, and he argues, much as Sheridan does, for a wider dissemination of knowledge on behalf of the nation’s political health. Gray cannot say, however, what should be the content of such knowledge, and that is just the historical crux. The poem cannot really move beyond its metaphors to a domain of reference:

As sickly Plants betray a niggard Earth,
Whose barren Bosom starves her gen’rous Birth
Nor genial Warmth, nor genial Juice retains
Their Roots to feed, and fill the Verdant Veigns:
And as in Climes, where Winter holds his Reign,
The Soil, tho’ fertile, will not teem in vein,
Forbids her Gems to swell, her Shades to rise,
Nor trusts her Blossoms to the churlish Skies. . . .

(1–8)

I invoke this ghostly parallel of the more famous stanzas from the *Elegy* not only to underline the historical relation between polite letters and political economy (the “alliance” of education and government), but in order to make intelligible the contradiction between the *Elegy*’s pathetic depiction of deprivation and the aloofness of the solitary, whom we cannot imagine condescending to teach the peasantry to read. The absurdity of such a hypothetical departure from the meditative narrative measures the peculiar force of a complex effect by which it is possible for readers to identify with

either the state of privilege or the state of deprivation, to indulge in the pathos of sympathy or the ethos of resentment. I mean to describe by this effect not the reason for the poem’s “canonization,” but the fact that it cannot be other than it is, that its conditions of production are such that it must occupy this place and no other in the history of literary production and reception.

The necessity of conceiving the conditions of production and reception as an indivisible complex can be demonstrated by glancing briefly at the position of the *Elegy* in Enfield’s *Speaker*. Gray’s poem is reprinted under the section heading “Descriptive Pieces,” and it is preceded by several other poems of his, as well as by poems of Goldsmith, Green, and Dyer. It is followed by a poem entitled “Warrington Academy,” by one “Mrs. Barbauld,” a writer no one would regard today as canonical. The adjacency of so titled a poem to Gray’s calls attention either to itself or to Gray, or to both. Enfield also quotes several lines from Mrs. Barbauld’s poem at the end of his opening dedication to John Lees, then president of Warrington Academy. The dedication boasts, as does the passage from Barbauld, of the successful careers pursued by graduates of the school:

In this Seminary, which was at first established, and has been uniformly conducted, on the extensive plan of providing a proper course of Instruction for young men in the most useful branches of Science and Literature, you have seen many respectable characters formed, who are now filling up their stations in society with reputation to themselves and advantage to the Public. And, while the same great object continues to be pursued, by faithful endeavours to cultivate the understandings of youth, and by a steady attention to discipline, it is hoped, that you will have the satisfaction to observe the same effects produced, and that the scene will be realized, which OUR POETESS has so beautifully described:

When this, this little group their country calls
From academic shades and learned halls,
To fix her laws, her spirit to sustain,
And light up glory thro’ her wide domain
Their various tastes indifferent arts display’d
Like temper’d harmony of light and shade,
With friendly union in one mass shall blend,
And this adorn the state, and that defend.³⁵

“Our Poetess,” Anna Laetitia Barbauld, is the daughter of the tutor Dr. Aiken, whose classroom practice is described above. Barbauld was a tal-

ented poet, well known in her own day, and extremely possessed of that mobility by which one travels in literary circles. In her later life she was a friend of both Wordsworth and Coleridge. She produced an edition of English novelists in fifty volumes (including many women novelists) and later a companion volume to Enfield's for women readers, entitled *The Female Speaker*. Barbauld was very much in the vanguard, then, of that anthropologizing movement by which English literature was given a canonical form.³⁶ In this context the pendant position of "Warrington Academy" in relation to Gray's poem is, as we may now demonstrate, not at all accidental: Barbauld's poem reads Gray's *Elegy* and so enacts its reception. But what it reads is precisely a poem about the conditions of literary production. Here are the first lines of the poem:

Mark where its simple form yon mansion rears,
The nursery of men for future years!
Here callow chiefs and embryo statesmen lie,
And unfledged poets short excursions try:
While Mersey's gentle current, which too long
By fame neglected, and unknown to song
Between his rushy banks (no poet's theme)
Had crept inglorious, like a vulgar stream,
Reflects th' ascending feats with conscious pride,
And dares to emulate a classic tide.

(1-10)

"Warrington Academy" belongs to the generic tradition of the topographical poem, of which Denham's "Cooper's Hill" provides, as Johnson remarks, the "original." The Mersey winds its way emblematically through the landscape as does the Thames in Denham's poem. In so locating her poem generically, Barbauld declines to pastoralize her subject, and this strategy has the effect of lifting the pastoral scrim from Gray's pretty set. Behind the generic veil certain social facts come sharply into focus: the struggle of individuals and social groups to rise. Gray's peasants of course do not struggle. Barbauld's word for the social fact she firmly grasps is "emulation," which here has all of the senses to which I have assigned it, preeminently "to compete by imitation." The important point here is that the opening lines express the fact of struggle through a rhetoric of literary culture; that culture is where the struggle takes place. So the Mersey emulates a "classic" tide, perhaps the following neoclassic *locus classicus*:

O could I flo like thee, and make thy stream
My great example, as it is my theme!

104

Though deep, yet clear, though gentle, yet not dull
Strong without rage, without overflowing full.

Denham reinscribes the ancient Ciceronian topos, the *universum flumen* of rhetorical topics, as the political topography of the Thames itself.³⁷ The effortless embodiment of the very fluidity they long for, these lines distill for Restoration culture everything that is left of the Renaissance nobility's *sprezzatura* into a single linguistic performance. And what unquestionably excited so many imitations of these lines was just the way in which its language becomes its referent. To imitate them is to celebrate the Restoration linguistic *politesse* as it stands for the Restoration polity. Barbauld opposes to Denham's Thames (picking up the rhyme on theme and stream) a naturally "gentle current" which is like a "vulgar stream" only in having had no poet to sing of it, or perhaps only a "mute, inglorious Milton" to languish on its "inglorious" banks. Gray's problem of wasted talent is regrounded in the language of the locodescriptive ur-text in order to set beside the stream of language itself the very institution within which that language is produced as a signifier of fluidity, of social mobility.

The distinction between "gentle" and "vulgar" thus activates the latent class referents of Denham's rhetoric while making a rather careful if also profound allusion to Gray's *Elegy*:

Here nature opens all her secret springs,
And heav'n born science plumes her eagle-wings:
Too long had bigot rage, with malice swelled,
Crush'd her strong pinions, and her flight withheld.

(17-20)

Ye generous youth who love this studious shade,
How rich a field is to your hopes display'd!
Knowledge to you unlocks the classic page;
And virtue blossoms for a better age.

(31-34)

Barbauld refers explicitly in the first set of lines to the laws by which Dissenters were excluded from access to institutions of learning. Her tropes supply a precise antecedent to the pronomial subjects of the universalized and abstracted condition of deprivation in the lines of the *Elegy* to which Barbauld alludes:

But knowledge to their eyes her ample page
Rich with the spoils of time did ne'er unroll;
Chill Penury repressed their noble rage,
And froze the genial current of their soul.

(49-52)

105

Of these lines one must observe the *absence* of a specific referent; one must notice the fact of abstraction as it apparently generalizes particular deprivations. Empson replicates Barbauld's response to the level of generalization in Gray's poem similarly by supplying a referent: "Eighteenth-century England had no scholarship system or *carrière ouverte aux talents*. This is stated as pathetic, but the reader is put in a mood in which one would not try to alter it." Indeed the pathos of sympathy might well end just there, in a "mood." The ethos of resentment is quite another matter, an active response: it accounts for the fact that Barbauld can locate Warrington Academy in a different generic and social space than Gray's pastoral landscape; it accounts for her fierce praise of successful "emulation." But this resentment is itself not wholly absent from Gray's poem; on the contrary, it is there as the object of repression, as the "noble rage" abstractly repressed by the abstraction "Chill Penury." Gray's landscape contains no historical social institutions, no historical aristocrats or peasants, and that is just the point of it. It is a landscape of abstract repression: "Penury" represses "rage."

In this context it matters very much how we read the "noble rage" standing as the object of this subjectless repression. Gray's most recent editor, Roger Lonsdale, hastens to note that Gray means by "rage" not "anger" but "rapture, ardour, inspiration (equivalent to the favourable sense of furor)."³⁸ Of course Gray does mean this, but it seems prematurely defensive to rule out as simply irrelevant any other sense of rage, as though it were ridiculous to imagine that the perennially impoverished would be anything but content with the frustration of their native talents. Does this editorial gesture not itself repress the other sense of rage? This question can hardly be decided by appealing confidently to what Gray means. Let us grant that he too may be strenuously repressing the "unfavorable" sense of rage. Gray takes his chances, though, by lyricizing, latinizing, or "ennobling" this rage. The hands performing the pastoral trick are momentarily too fast to follow, and while the topos of innate nobility is a convention of the genre, the temporary ennobling of the peasants liberates an uncontrollable irony. The repression of a truly noble rage, freezing the very current of gentility, ought to provoke nothing less than outrage. In the absence of such a response, the irony lapses into the pathos of generalization: the common, because merely figurative, nobility of gentle and commoner. That the irony does not so lapse for Barbauld or Empson does not attest to inaccurate reading—they merely stand perplexed before the absence of anger. If Barbauld can then transpose Gray's "noble rage" into the "bigot rage" of the Anglican hegemony against the Dissenters, this projection reveals very tellingly how much repressed violence makes up the institutional agenda of

"emulation." Imitation is the insincerest form of flattery. Barbauld reads into Gray's poem, then, the immediate circumstances of her own literary production, the very conditions that bring Warrington Academy into existence. Her reading discovers at the same time what is really there in the *Elegy*—an absence of reference, a structure of abstract repression, which Empson makes concrete once again by specifying that absence as the absence of a "scholarship system," the *carrière ouverte aux talents*.

Literacy and Literature in the *Elegy*

Nor you, ye poor, of lettered scorn complain
To you the smoothest song is smooth in vain.

—CRABBE, "The Village"

The maudlin irony of Crabbe's lines, and indeed of "The Village" as a whole, may be said to mark the furthest and perhaps unintentionally the funniest actualization of that potential irony in Gray's elegy for unrealized potential. As such Crabbe's lines are an interesting reading of their pretext; they describe a repression so successful that its victims have not even the means to detect its operation. Hence the imperative verb "Nor . . . complain" turns out to be, after all, merely declarative: the poor can hardly complain about the contents of works they cannot read. Gray's more genteel syntactical choice is the Latinate subjunctive:

Let not Ambition mock their useful toil,
Their homely joys and destiny obscure;
Nor grandeur hear, with a disdainful smile,
The short and simple annals of the poor.

The slight drift of the last two lines in the direction of a Crabbe-like irony is arrested in the next stanza by the much greater irony of the figure of death, who, if he does not laugh last, smiles last. Beside the ironist who fatally embraces both the rich and the poor, the social repression that produces material inequality dwindles to insignificance. This irony has been a great comfort to many of Gray's critics, who have hailed the figure of death as the properly universal theme of the poem; indeed it would be difficult to argue that the poem is *not* about death. Yet critics have often been able to assert that the poem is about death only by asserting that it is not about something else: "The central subject of the *Elegy* is not the contrast between the poor and the great, but the nature and meaning of epitaphs."³⁹ The *mise-en-scène* speaks clearly to this point: the peasants whom the narrator evokes are all dead, and he is moved to speculate about what they might possibly have done in their lives. This meditative affect is so totally envelop-

ing as to lull the idiot questioner in the critic, but a less sensitive reader might raise a point of simple logic: surely Gray is not saying the hypothetical accomplishments of the peasants were prevented by *death*? Surely they were prevented by the very conditions of peasant existence, by poverty? The slippage between these terms is nonetheless very functional; the concept of "death" is the slipperiest of signifiers, the most likely to take on the metaphoric task of signifying any blockage, failure, inhibition. The question of relevance to Gray's poem is what regions of signifying are traversed by the signifier "death." And here it is possible to propose a specific hypothesis: The invocation of death is the rhetorical mechanism by which the social structure of repression is *abstracted*, rendered subjectless and objectless.

The mechanism of abstraction is not instanced, then, simply by the metaphorizing of deprivation as death-like, the "chill" hands of Penury. The moment of death structures every micro-narrative of the nameless peasants' hypothetical other lives by allowing us to forget that their actual lives are foreshortened by poverty and not by death:

Perhaps in this neglected spot is laid
Some heart once pregnant with celestial fire;
Hands that the rod of empire might have swayed,
Or waked to ecstasy the living lyre. . . .

(45-48)

The conditions preventing such accomplishment must obtain equally for the living peasants whom the narrator has just observed trudging wearily to their homes, and it will not do therefore to say that these conditions are by implication compared figurally to death. The "celestial fire" that might have eventuated in great deeds is only observed at all when it is irrecoverably buried, when the possibility of its expression is absolutely foreclosed. The micronarratives are founded, then, upon a logical contradiction, which is yet necessary in order to produce the pathos of these narratives. This contradiction consists, as I have hinted earlier, in the imaginary scenario of envisioning the invisible object of a perfect repression. Empson's irritable insistence that "a gem does not mind being in a cave, and a flower prefers not to be picked" strains against the illogic of the poem's imaginary scenario not by questioning the typically ideological motif of "naturalizing" social determinations, but by turning the tables of Gray's metaphor—giving flowers and gems a will which was not given to the peasants in the first place. They neither resist nor acquiesce in their repression, which is to say either that they are dead or that they do indeed suffer from a perfect and therefore asymptomatic repression.

If it is barely possible to speak in this context of repression without also invoking the domain of psychoanalysis, that temptation is quite instructive and should make it possible to look again at these most familiar lines of English poetry, which translate the process of canon formation into the occasion of an intense pathos by inviting us to imagine the great unwritten works of an unlettered populace. The (psycho)analytic gaze, however, might detect in the illogic of Gray's scenario of pathos the obvious betrayal of the supposedly perfect repression: "Full many a flower is born to *blush* unseen." Of course this blush has been caught unaware, since the flower may be said not to know that it is the object of anyone's gaze. Who blushes when alone? The blush is the failure and thus the only evidence of repression. This repression takes as its object another sort of passion than the "noble rage" of the preceding stanza. Empson rightly seizes upon this bizarre touch to expose yet another "trick" of Gray's pastoral: "The sexual suggestion of blush brings in the Christian idea that virginity is good in itself, and so that any renunciation is good; this may trick us into feeling it is lucky for the poor man that society keeps him unspotted from the World." That the blush conveys a "sexual suggestion" is unmistakable, but that the agency of this repression can be simply assimilated to "society" is worth considering more carefully. The psychosomatic blush implies a form of self-censorship, even if this censorship can then be referred to social constraints of various sorts. The attempt to keep down or repress a sexual passion takes over from "Chill Penury" the job of repression, and so converts a social into a psychic repression.

The model of repression that emerges from these lines structures the next four stanzas, which gradually substitute a more complex and ambiguous rage for the "noble rage" of the thirteenth stanza, a rage that first took the form of great "virtue" but finally comes to signify the sheer negativity of individual lusts and ambitions:

Some village-Hampden, that with dauntless breast
The little Tyrant of his fields withstood;
Some mute inglorious Milton here may rest,
Some Cromwell guiltless of his country's blood.

Th' applause of list'ning senates to command,
The threats of pain and ruin to despise,
To scatter plenty o'er a smiling land,
And read their his'try in a nation's eyes

Their lot forbade: nor circumscrib'd alone
Their growing virtues, but their crimes confin'd;

Forbade to wade through slaughter to a throne,
And shut the gates of mercy on mankind,

The struggling pangs of conscious truth to hide,
To quench the blushes of ingenuous shame,
Or heap the shrine of Luxury and Pride
With incense kindled at the Muse's flame.

Far from the madding crowd's ignoble strife,
Their sober wishes never learn'd to stray;
Along the cool sequester'd vale of life
They kept the noiseless tenour of their way.

(57-76)

The reappearance of "blushes" in the later stanza (line 69) only confirms its secret determination of the repressive process; nor would it be merely fanciful to say that the stanzas quoted stage a grand scene of blushing, as the only too modest speaker recoils against every excess of ambition. In the same peculiar way that a blush arouses desire by betraying a sexual feeling at the same time that it signifies modesty, these lines betray ambition *repressed*. Gray is quite caught up in this moment of betrayal by the blood, of failed repression. By the end of the last stanza quoted we are quite beyond the celebration of the peasantry's "noble rage." Their "sober wishes" are in perfect accord with the very repressive process that forbids them to wish for any object not defined as "sober." It is this process of "forbidding" which governs the strangely convoluted syntax of the wishes which are expressed only to be immediately canceled out:

Forbade: The struggling pangs of conscious truth to hide . . .

Forbade: To quench the blushes of ingenuous shame . . .

That is, the peasants are incapable of lying in the way that the ambitious lie when they successfully suppress the telltale blush at the magnitude of their crimes. These great ones are like pathological liars who can fool the polygraph machine, who can sin without blushing. The poor may desire what the wealthy and ambitious desire, but they blush with shame at the recognition of those desires, and as a consequence they can be approved for pursuing "the noiseless tenour of their way." When we relate this telltale blush to its predecessor in the line "Full many a flower is born to blush unseen," the homology of poverty and obscurity produces, as we may now demonstrate, a curious equation between social and *literary* ambition. It is in this sense that the poem meditates on the process of what we call canon formation, by projecting onto the figure of the peasant a certain pleasure in the very non-

existence of poems by the "mute, inglorious Milton." The very conditions enabling literary production can thus be reexperienced as morally inferior to the conditions which *constrain* production.

The reading proposed here does not yet address that contradiction by which the violence evoked in the stanzas quoted can signify either the violence imposed from above on inferiors in the social order or a more disturbing because *revolutionary* violence (signified by the allusion to Hampden, Milton, and Cromwell). All evocations of violence in the poem are tendentially assimilated to the motive of ambition, but by way of an allusion to the civil war, an allusion which imposes upon that conflict a certain reductive interpretation suggested by the phrase "ignoble strife." If there is no such thing as "noble strife" within the terms of the poem, the attempt to equate strife itself with the essentially ignoble is belied by the phrase "ingenuous shame," which activates the Latinate sense of *ingenuus*, meaning "of noble birth." The secondary but now standard sense—"frank, open, guileless"—attributes to the noble-born a quality of innate expressivity, an inability to conceal noble birth. "Ingenuous shame," on the other hand (the Latin hand), hints at a kind of class-shame, the noble's betrayal of his own blood at the moment at which the blushes are "quenched," when that blood fails to appear. "Ignoble strife" might very well be an appropriate term to bring into association with the nobility, inasmuch as it characterizes in a general way the political order Gray's contemporaries called "Old Corruption."⁴⁰ We might think in this context of the satiric productions of Grub Street, of its scandalous narratives of Ambition, Luxury, and Pride among real lords and ladies. Gray's desire to idealize aristocratic culture appears to contradict his simultaneous idealization of peasant culture, just because his social topography does not locate Ambition, Luxury, or Pride definitively in one social group. These terms can define what is in a generally metaphoric sense "ignoble," and conversely the absence of these same motives can define in a generally metaphoric sense what is "noble." The problem raised by the pastoral topos of the aristocrat-as-peasant, however, is that the metaphorical nobility of the peasants is supposed to characterize what is *really*, essentially, the class character of the nobility. It is in this context that we need to ask what Gray means when he substitutes Hampden, Milton, and Cromwell for Cato, Tully, and Caesar in the published version of lines 57-60. For that "translation" into the vernacular finally locates "Ambition" in *literary culture*, where the shrine of "Luxury and Pride" is heaped with "incense kindled at the Muse's flame." We may now conjecture that the appearance of Milton's name in connection with Hampden and Cromwell marks an attempt to regroup literary production in an ethos entirely incompatible with that

signified by "Ambition, Luxury, and Pride." This ethos, I would suggest, is aristocratic, but precisely in the sense governed by the pastoral topos of the aristocrat-as-peasant.

The nature of this ethos can be recovered by tracing the allusion in Gray's "quench the blushes" to its source in Act IV, scene iv, of *The Winter's Tale*, the very scene in which the innate nobility of the noble-born is proven in the figure of Perdita:

Come, quench your blushes, and present yourself
That which you are, mistress o' the feast.

(IV, iv, 67-68)

In these lines the Old Shepherd chides Perdita for her "retirement," for behaving as though she were the "feasted one" and not simply the country hostess. But she is, after all, a real princess whose "noble rage" is repressed in her identity as peasant girl. Even in such a lowly setting, the innate expressiveness of the noble cannot be entirely repressed and betrays itself through the blood, as Perdita's "blush." What I will call Perdita's *expressive reserve* is an example of what Bourdieu, following Mauss, calls a habitus: "a system of durable, transposable dispositions" where disposition is defined as "a way of being, a habitual state (especially of the body)." ⁴¹ The system of these dispositions and their interrelations, as determined in Bourdieu's account by class position, have the function of regulating the practices of social life. These dispositions need not be consciously articulated as motives, either class or individual, nor need they take the discursive form of ethical norms. Rather they are the result of an internalization of regulatory procedures capable of being objectified in the body itself as ways of speaking or moving. Perdita expresses the disposition of aristocratic grace in the perfect (and therefore imaginary) form of pure, expressive motion, which Florizel figures metaphorically as "a wave o' the sea," and which he desires to contemplate only and forever in this abstracted form: "move still, still so, and own no other function." That function is refined to an expression or objectification of noble blood so pure that individual actions lose any other function than the signifying of status: As Florizel says to Perdita, "all your acts are queens."

We are now prepared to take the full measure of Gray's investment in this pastoral topos. The hypothetical achievements of the peasantry can be represented in the poem as at once tragically repressed; but on the other hand, no achievements are named in the poem which are not deplored as instances of Ambition, Luxury, and Pride: hence Milton is flanked by Hampden and Cromwell. These figures of ambition are firmly displaced in the following stanzas by an ethos of serene resignation defining the ideal

aristocratic habitus of expressive reserve, but a habitus which is *reflected* in the peasantry. The absence of social emulation that imaginarily defines the Perdita-like aristocrat—because she need never claim to be any more than *what she is*—is translated into pastoral terms as the proposition that the noble makes a better peasant than the peasant. No one is more modest than Perdita, farther from the madding crowd, and this is the sense in which, generically speaking, the peasant stands for the nobleman. Gray's appropriation of this topos is not merely belated, however. Gray is not after all recommending an ethos of noble reserve to the *peasant*, despite the unambiguous praise for the "noiseless tenour" of peasant life. The poem does not really address the peasantry. While the noble habitus can be represented by the imperturbable and natural nobility of literary peasants, these peasants cannot at the same time be represented as miserably impoverished. ⁴² The peasants, in other words, cannot be both *literary* and real peasants. This fact is quite obvious in the rejected manuscript conclusion to the poem, where Gray attributes the noble rage buried in pastoral obscurity not to the peasantry but to himself:

The thoughtless World to Majesty may bow
Exalt the brave, & idolize Success
But more to Innocence their Safety owe
Than Power and Genius e'er conspired to bless

And thou, who mindful of the unhonour'd Dead
Dost in these Notes their artless Tale relate
By Night & lonely Contemplation led
To linger in the gloomy Walks of Fate

Hark how the sacred Calm, that broods around
Bids ev'ry fierce tumultous Passion cease
In still small Accents whisp'ring from the Ground
A grateful Earnest of eternal Peace

No more with Reason & thyself at strife;
Give anxious Cares & endless Wishes room
But thro' the cool sequester'd Vale of Life
Pursue the silent Tenour of thy Doom.

The manuscript attributes the "silent Tenour" to Gray himself, but the published line reads: "Dost in these Notes *their* artless Tale relate" (emphasis mine). It is as though Gray had momentarily forgotten that he is not himself a peasant. But what is at stake after all in an identification with the peasantry? Here again we must insist that the referent of these negotiations

is *literary culture*. This point is much clearer in the context of Gray's revision of the conclusion, where resignation becomes resignation not to poverty but to *obscurity*. The revision corrects the illogic of deriving from the deprivations of peasant existence a program of resignation to the speaker's rather different "doom"; and so "anxious Cares and endless Wishes" are given a specific content relating to the desire for *literary fame*.

The rejected manuscript conclusion brings out somewhat more explicitly than the published version the consistent analogy in the *Elegy* between political and literary ambition, between Cromwell and Milton, and conversely between the obscurity of the peasantry and the lack of literary fame. For this reason we can be relatively certain that the prospect of a "mute, inglorious Milton" focuses the largest and most intense anxiety in the poem. At this point we find ourselves disembarked upon the terrain of some traditional interpretations of the poem, which take as the premise of their readings the subjectivity of the poetic persona, whose "melancholy" suggests at once the inevitability of death and the tragedy of literary obscurity. This literary subjectivity is really the final product of the poem's composition (in its successive versions) and not at all the basis of that composition. The poem discovers this melancholy subject as the solution to its intractable problems, and hence the specular eye of the first stanza is refashioned in the final version into the pastoral poet who so oddly languishes in the countryside merely to die and be remembered as of that world and yet not of it. Here it might be easy to provide the motive of the melancholy, the reason for its convergence upon mourning, by invoking the convenient narrative of Gray's frustrated poetic ambitions (in the phrase Matthew Arnold liked so much, "he never spoke out").⁴³ But this argument reads a retrospective judgment upon Gray's production into the literary melancholy of the poem, as though Gray never wrote again, or as though he were not famous in his own time. I propose to read the surprising emergence of the melancholy poetic subjectivity at the end of the poem rather differently. The purpose of such a reading is not to reject the relevance of "poetic ambition," frustrated or otherwise, as a motive but to place that motive in relation to the "Ambition" already extensively thematized in the poem. What one is able to explain within this frame of argument is not Gray's attempt to write his personal frustrations, whatever they may be, into figurative or narrative terms, but the very ambivalence about social emulation that works itself out through and with reference to the conditions of literary production. For what characterizes the melancholy poet of the later stanzas is not simply acquiescence in, or resentment against, the frustration of ambition, but the contradiction between emulation (or ambition) and its *systematic self-repression*.

The published version of the poem thus effects a reconstellation of the

Elegy's generic terms, submitting the looseness of the locodescriptive lyric to the order of a pastoral narrative. Further, the construction of the melancholy poet as both subject and object of writing reorients the process of repression to bring to the fore the relation between literary fame and obscurity, while allowing the relation of wealth and poverty to recede into the background. The imagined death of the poet functions obviously enough as the repressive agency producing resignation to obscurity as a metonymic corollary of resignation to death ("No farther seek his merits to disclose"). Yet one wants to observe how peculiar this scenario really is. Gray derives his concluding narrative without doubt from the poem he most frequently echoes in the *Elegy*, Milton's *Lycidas*, a poem whose argument is premised upon the causal relation, in Milton's anxious view, between the death of Edward King "ere his prime" and the foreclosure of fame, the very anxiety which constructs Edward King as the prototype of the "mute, inglorious Milton." Gray's melancholy poet is for this reason, and for no other, a "youth." Milton's grief is provoked by a strong identification with the dead *Lycidas*, an identification that sidetracks the poem almost immediately into the fantasized scenario of Milton's own death and funeral. Gray ends his poem here, where Milton begins:

So may some gentle Muse
With lucky words favor my destined Urn
And as he passes turn
And bid fair peace be to my sable Shroud.

Milton's solution to the problem of premature death is to place *Lycidas* at the threshold between life and death as the "genius of the shore," thus reassuring himself that he will not cross this threshold before he has accomplished the work that will gain him an "immortality of fame." The "uncouth swain" who shuffles off the coil of mortal thoughts is recreated by Gray as the "hoary-headed swain" who recounts the death of the alter-ego rustic poet. In that sense Gray may be said to identify more completely than Milton with the figure of Edward King. Gray's extension of the Miltonic scenario is surprisingly more complex than *Lycidas* itself; it requires a multiplication of Lycidean figures ("Thee," "swain," and "kindred spirit") as a means of shuttling between its imaginary temporal moments:

For thee, who mindful of th' unhonour'd Dead
Dost in these lines their artless tale relate
If chance, by Lonely contemplation led,
Some kindred Spirit shall inquire thy fate,
Haply some hoary-headed Swain may say . . .

(93-97)

If the immediately following lines are caught in the abyssal trap of having to quote the swain on the death of the poet who is himself writing the lines the swain speaks, this instability of reference follows predictably from the problematic contradictions of the earlier stanzas.⁴⁴ The dead poet addressed as the projection of Gray's own self is imagined to speak from the grave just as the buried gem is imagined to shine in its unfathomed cave. It should be evident that Gray does not, as does Milton, express directly a fear of death. On the contrary, death is the signifier of an attractive self-repression (self-burial), an almost successful repression of a subject who yet leaves behind the trace of his repression in the form of a somewhat lengthy epitaph. As the sole remainder and reminder of the rustic poet's life and work, the graven epitaph is the means by which Gray's very belated deployment of pastoral is fused with the complex structure of Milton's elegy. The narrative that results brings the conditions of literary production into relation with the orders of social distinction by foregrounding in an egregious parenthesis the fact of literacy as a requisite to the reception of that text: "Approach and read (for thou canst read) the lay." Now this parenthetical admission has in a certain sense been implicit all along in Gray's choice of exemplary figures of ambition from the realms of politics and poetry, in retrospect an overdetermined linkage. While it may be no more than banally true that the conditions of peasant existence must prevent the rise of any one of them to power or wealth, the same conditions do not obtain with regard to literary production. *Only death* can silence Milton in the imaginary narrative future of *Lycidas*, but the "mute, inglorious Milton" of the *Elegy* is silenced by what constitutes *muteness*—not an inability to speak but an inability to read or write. Hence Gray dissociates himself from his "hoary-headed swain" by reclaiming his higher social station, by reasserting his position within (at the least) a literate culture. If it can nevertheless be said that Gray also casts himself as the "mute, inglorious Milton" of the *Elegy* by burying his poetic alter ego "ere his prime" in the country churchyard, this figure continues to resemble the Perdita-like character of the aristocrat-as-peasant in knowing somehow, as if congenitally, how to read and write. On this complex and subtly disingenuous mystification, we can do no better than to quote another of Shakespeare's country folk, Constable Dogberry: "To be a well-favoured man is a gift of fortune, but to read and write comes by nature." Such natural literacy betrays the rustic poet's class origins just as much as Perdita's ingenuous blush; it is the fact of literacy—writing as a mnemonic technology—that prevents the poet from being entirely lost in pastoral obscurity.

The absence of a class or institutional place of origin for Gray's solitary thus allows that figure to stand as an aristocrat in relation to the peasantry, and as a peasant in relation to the ruling class:

Here rests his head upon the lap of earth
A youth to fortune and to fame unknown.
Fair Science frowned not on his humble birth,
And Melancholy marked him for her own.

(117–20)

Where, after all, does this youth come from, if he ends up in the country churchyard? The very social dislocation of the figure is surely what determines his subject position as at once humble and *privileged*: "Fair Science frowned not on his humble birth." Gray's melancholy poet cannot be reduced to a projection of his writing anxieties, however large they may be; and the figure of the solitary is in fact already a convention of mid-century poetry. John Sitter names this convention "literary loneliness," and takes it to signify a recoil from public life and the large historical concerns so conspicuously foregrounded in post-Restoration literature.⁴⁵ While it may suffice to Sitter's argument to present this circumstance as merely a reaction to the perceived tumult of what Habermas calls the "bourgeois public sphere," this explanation is slightly misleading if it suggests that mid-century poets have themselves withdrawn from that sphere by disdaining certain "public" genres or themes.⁴⁶ The figure of the solitary expresses ambivalence about the emergence of the public sphere, but that expression itself belongs to the public sphere by virtue of being literary, by virtue of being *published*. This is the very paradox that Gray's poem inscribes by fetishizing the ignorance of the peasant as a kind of covert nobility, by having it both ways. "Where ignorance is bliss, 'tis folly to be wise!"

What we shall now be able to demonstrate is the fact that such a strategy scarcely makes sense for either the aristocratic or the peasant writer (and we shall be introduced to one of the latter presently). Gray's solitary belongs neither to the aristocracy nor to the peasantry. If it now seems that by process of elimination the homeless solitary is in some sense "bourgeois," this identification is not at all simple. English society of the mid-eighteenth century is characterized structurally by a gradient of middle classes who identify themselves in a variety of conflicting and mutually exclusive ways (by economic, professional, political, religious affiliation) but not yet as a bourgeoisie. Even within the "middling sort" the difference between, for example, the merchant and the scholar is crucial with respect to self-identification. We can also expect that strategies of self-identification are intrinsically unstable wherever a claim is made to upward mobility of any sort, real or imagined; and that therefore the only identification of the bourgeoisie as yet available to the bourgeois in general is precisely a lack of stable self-identification. In the absence of a fully articulated "political economy" which might describe the relation between wealth and power in

terms of the social consanguinity of all property, the self-identification of classes is itself an arena of social struggle. Rather than broaden the scope of these generalizations any farther, I propose only to characterize the social order (along the lines suggested by Benedict Anderson) in such a way as to underline the immense social significance of polite letters as a transformative cultural force, an arena at once of upward mobility and of the cultural unification of the ruling classes.

The emergence of a "common reader," a literary "public," was by no means universally welcomed; it could be actively resisted as a process of cultural *degeneration*. The "quarrel between the ancients and the moderns," for example, registers the level of anxiety produced by increased vernacular literary production in the public sphere. It was quite possible to regard the tendency toward a cultural homogenization of the middle and upper classes as the degeneration of culture itself. Here we can begin to understand how Gray's substitution of "Hampden, Milton, and Cromwell" for the manuscript version's "Cato, Tully, and Caesar" might be said to stigmatize the transition from classical to vernacular literacy as a kind of revolutionary violence, indeed as the "bourgeois revolution" itself. While the allusion to the civil war may express Gray's "personal" contempt for the public, his desire to be considered a "gentleman," these terms are less idiosyncratic than they may at first seem. The very extremity of Gray's reaction argues that the redistribution of cultural capital is in a very real sense a revolutionary process. If the cultural capital represented by vernacular literacy signifies to some social groups the possibility of upward mobility, it can also signify the devaluation of the cultural capital possessed by other individuals or groups. In Gray's famous ambivalence about publication, one sees how it is possible for polite letters to react *against itself*. Such moments in Gray, and in mid-century literary culture, represent a backward-flowing eddy in the stream of literary culture, as that stream broadens into the bourgeois public sphere. The cultural capital which in its "public" place becomes the means of upward mobility thus reappears within Gray's literary landscape as the occasion for a kind of vertiginous homelessness, for the dislocation of the melancholy poet who imaginarily identifies with the displaced aristocrat of Renaissance pastoral.

In a sense we have only taken rather literally the fact that the subject of withdrawal in Gray's poem is a poet. If the authorial subject has determinate relations to the institutions of cultural capital, one must say that the "Eton" Gray elsewhere apostrophized as a "distant prospect" is only just over the horizon of the *Elegy's* landscape. At this point my reading of the internal argument of the *Elegy* necessarily rejoins my reading of the poem's reception in stressing the essential rightness of Barbauld's revision of

Gray's poem in order to foreground the institution absent from the scene of the poem. She writes after the moment at which the solitary's cultural significance has peaked, and from a class position embracing unequivocally the effects of vernacular literacy. The difference between Eton and Warrington Academy, or between classical and vernacular literacy, marks two different and incompatible strategies of social emulation. For Barbauld there is no repression of ambition and equally no simple identification with the ethos of the gentleman. The withdrawal of Gray's solitary, by contrast, acts out the contradiction between social emulation and the idealized aristocratic habitus of expressive reserve by embodying that contradiction in the pastoral topos of aristocrat-as-peasant.

The imitation by would-be gentlemen such as Gray of what Norbert Elias calls the "drive-economy" of the nobility—all those norms of civility which function historically to sublimate competitive violence within the nobility—is thus demonstrably bourgeois.⁴⁷ The textual enactment of an imitative ethos belongs to a continuum of imitative social behaviors expressed most conspicuously, of course, by Gray's disdain for publication, as though he still belonged to a manuscript culture of courtly poets, but also by his disinclination to accept money for his poems, even though Dodsley, his publisher, made large sums printing them.⁴⁸ To dismiss these facts to the category of the anecdotal is to misjudge the real political force of polite letters. Gray's ambivalent relation to the public sphere is the exact inversion of Barbauld's resentment of the privilege of social superiors, but it unquestionably also participates in that resentment as a reaction formation. In the early modern period, contempt for the culture of the vulgar was expressed by the development of a new "humanist" High Culture, and took the linguistic form of a renewed valuation of classical literary production. This valuation was so universally assumed that Waller could write as late as the mid-seventeenth century, "poets that lasting marble seek, / Must carve in Latin, or in Greek."⁴⁹ The vernacular *Hochsprache*, because it both embodied and eventually overcame this inferiority complex, finally undermined the conditions for continued production in the classical languages, and by the middle of the eighteenth century there ceased to be a readership for such writing. At the same time the classical languages continued to define the most elite educational capital as against the actual social importance of the languages disseminated in the coffeehouses and the vocational academies.

The moment we are examining under high magnification here can be described in the terms formulated by Raymond Williams as a complex overlapping of "residual" and "emergent" cultural formations. The technique of linguistic normalization employed by Gray in the *Elegy* clearly ne-

gotiates a certain emergence, but its "residual" pastoralism also resists (as it happens, unsuccessfully) the very linguistic properties which made the poem uniquely *popular*. In most of his poetry, Gray was concerned to develop a rather different linguistic practice, a "poetic diction," which replicated *within the vernacular* a distinction like the distinction between classical and vernacular literacy. This distinction could be articulated as an essential difference between poetry and prose, which Gray describes and celebrates in his famous letter to Richard West:

As to the matter of stile, I have this to say: the language of the age is never the language of poetry; except among the French, whose verse, where the thought or image does not support it, differs in nothing from prose. Our poetry, on the contrary has a language peculiar to itself: to which almost everyone, that has written, has added something by enriching it with foreign idioms and derivatives: Nay sometimes words of their own composition or invention. Shakespeare and Milton have been great creators in this way; and no one more licentious than Pope or Dryden, who perpetually borrow expressions from the former.⁵⁰

But the difference celebrated in this letter was resisted by some of his readers, among them of course Johnson, who condemned it as the "refinements of subtlety and the dogmatism of learning." Only the *Elegy* was exempt from the reservation Johnson expressed about much the rest of Gray's poetry: "Gray thought his language more poetical as it was more remote from common use." Perhaps the most important fact for us to recognize now about the historical situation of the *Elegy* is that it is a linguistically anomalous production for Gray. The poet acknowledged this fact himself in disdaining his poem's popularity, its very commonness. In 1765 he remarked "with some acrimony" to his friend Dr. Gregory, "that the *Elegy* owed its popularity entirely to its subject, and that the public would have received it as well if it had been written in prose."⁵¹ But to say that the poem was misread as though it were prose is to admit the degree to which the language of the poem is already the language of vernacular prose; it is to recognize the degree to which the poem normalizes its classical and Renaissance sources. The transparency of the *Elegy's* language to its commonplaces, the immediacy of its intelligibility, is not a measure, then, of public misperception so much as it is of the very pressure of the common language on the language of the poem. The place of the *Elegy* in the world of cultural production is just at the intersection of two opposing forces: the homogenizing forces expressed by the commonplaces and the common language;

and the differentiating forces expressed by the nostalgic evocation of the pastoral genre and the valorized withdrawal from the public sphere. The fact that the *Elegy's* language failed to be perceived, in Gray's own terms, as "the language of poetry" situates it where these forces have canceled themselves out, where poetic diction *fails to appear*. This unique place of rest, the place which is the poem, renders no reader illiterate by "refinements of subtlety and the dogmatism of learning." To every common reader is given the pleasure of the commonplace and the common language, and at the same time, the pleasure of withdrawal from the (urban) place—the scene of Ambition, Luxury, and Pride—where this language is formed as the product of a specific kind of struggle, the agon of social mobility. The *Elegy* is thus at once peculiarly accessible to a wide reading public at the same time that its narrative reinscribes this access as innate rather than-acquired. The very attractiveness of its pastoralizing narrative effaces the struggle for cultural capital and propels the reader into that imaginary identification which, as Bourdieu has pointed out, continually misrecognizes bourgeois culture as a kind of "aristocracy of culture." The cultural entitlement that for Gray is defined by classical literacy, by his immense learning, is thus acquired by his readers at a *discount*, at the cost only of acquiring the vernacular literacy requisite to reading the poem.

If the difference between poetic diction and prose diction reproduces the effect of the distinction between classical and vernacular literacy, this difference has enormous significance for the process of canon formation, since the very possibility of canonical English prose depends upon the outcome of the negotiation between these two kinds of linguistic capital. The elision by which, in the two previous centuries, all literature was poetry and only poetry was literature, is no longer possible if the bourgeois sociolect is increasingly grounded in paradigms derived from prose, especially novelistic prose.⁵² Gray understood that the distinction between poetry and prose was at stake in the popularity of the *Elegy*, but that distinction was at stake only because it had the force of a social distinction. This does not mean that the distinction between poetry and prose had never before corresponded to a distinction between high and low culture (as it does certainly in Shakespeare's plays), but that this difference was not a difference between the *language* of poetry and the *language* of prose. Renaissance prose remained as open to neologism, archaism, complex figuration, and foreign borrowing as Renaissance poetry. The same cannot be said for eighteenth-century prose, which defined itself against these very strategies, as a normalized national language. The social function served by the institution of a vernacular literary curriculum in the schools exerted considerable pressure on the process of canonical selection, since paradigms of grammatical speech

could just as easily, if not more easily, be derived from prose narrative as from poetry. If certain genres of prose (the novel, for example) were ever to become canonical, the full implementation of such a judgment would have to wait for the development of a category of writing that would include both poetry and fictional prose. This category was of course to be "literature," but the important point is that "literature" in mid-century England did not yet refer to fictive or imaginative writing, as Raymond Williams is careful to remind us in his invaluable consideration of this category:

Literature was still primarily reading ability and reading experience, and this included philosophy, history, and essays as well as poems. Were the new eighteenth-century novels "literature"? That question was first approached, not by definition of their mode or content, but by reference to the standards of "polite" or "humane" learning. Was drama literature? This question was to exercise successive generations, not because of any substantial difficulty but because of the practical limits of the category.⁵³

Literature so defined corresponded in the bourgeois public sphere to the kind of literary producer known as the "man of letters." We can do no better here than to quote that most exemplary man of letters, David Hume, for a sense of what "literature" meant in mid-century England. The text is a letter to Gilbert Elliot of 1757, and the subject is the distinction of Scottish writers:

Is it not strange that, at a time when we have lost our princes, our parliaments, our independent government,—even the presence of our chief nobility; are unhappy, in our accent and pronunciation; speak a very corrupt dialect of the tongue we make use of,—is it not strange, I say, that, in these circumstances we should really be the people most distinguished for literature in Europe?⁵⁴

Hume's remark grasps with his usual precision the ambiguity of "literature," at once the vehicle in the schools for inculcating a practice of standardized *speech*, but also the medium by which the social limitations of an incorrect dialect, or a low class accent, might be circumvented. Hume's claim in this letter is interestingly framed by a portrait of his fellow countryman and "peasant poet," William Wilkie, one of the mid-century's many peasant poets.⁵⁵ Wilkie was the author of a pseudo-classical "Epigoniad," as noncanonical a poem as one might ever hope to rediscover. With considerable delight, Hume recounts the story of how his friend

Jemmy Russel brought an Englishman, a Dr. Roebuck, to visit Wilkie. Roebuck found the peasant poet in his fields, much besmirched with the grime of his labor, but happy to discourse with his visitor upon the Greek poets:

Dr. Roebuck, who had scarce understood his rustic English, or rather his broad Scotch, immediately comprehended him, for his Greek was admirable; and on leaving him, he could not forbear expressing the highest admiration to Russel, that a clown, a rustic, a mere hind, such as he saw this fellow was, should be possessed of so much erudition.

Of course the point of this anecdote is chauvinistic, justly so; but we may derive from it another moral, with reference to the situation of Gray's mute, inglorious Miltons, who write no Epigoniads. Hume's peasant poet knows very well that what really counts as cultural capital is knowledge of Greek and Latin. Vernacular literacy appears not at all in this story; and yet it is writing in *English* which supports Hume's larger claim for his countrymen's distinction in "literature." It is the emergence of vernacular literacy which brings the category of "literature" to the forefront of the public sphere, and names the "man of letters" as its producer.

Jerome Christensen has recently argued for a reading of Hume's literary career that would allow us to recognize the appearance in the eighteenth century of an order of literature which temporarily canonized figures who have since been displaced from that order by the emergence of a much narrower category of literature: the "imaginative" genres—poetry, novels, and plays. Christensen points out that Hume very consciously "sought to create a canon that would have the classical, particularly Ciceronian virtues of comprehensiveness and independence."⁵⁶ The fact that Cicero still belongs to the canon of "classical literature," while Hume no longer belongs to the canon of English literature is a peculiarity of the history of canon formation which the present critique of the canon remains unable to see at all. But its consequences are immense, and testify to the larger point of this book, that canonical *forms*, the categories of textual appropriation and reproduction in their institutional sites, operate as mechanisms of selection before individuals exercise judgments, of whatever kind.

To summarize, then: between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries three such canonical forms appear: (1) *poetry*, which privileges the texts of classical literacy; (2) *literature* (in the general sense) or "polite letters," which privileges writing in the vernacular; and (3) *literature* (in the restricted sense) or "imaginative" writing, which privileges poetry, novels, and plays. In retrospect, it seems evident that Gray's resistance to being

identified as a "man of letters" situates his own literary production between the order of "poetry" and the order of "literature" in the general sense. His valuation of "poetic diction" looks back to the Renaissance canonical form of poetry. Nevertheless one must immediately qualify that statement by insisting that poetic diction is not simply archaic: it represents a *reaction* against polite letters as the emergent discourse of the bourgeois public sphere. In another sense such a reaction is not reactionary at all. It presages the effort of literature at a later moment to distinguish itself from the very kinds of writing which defined polite letters. The problem of poetic diction is, after all, the problem of the cultural *distinction* of poetry, and in that sense the argument for poetic diction argues for the greater cultural capital of poetic forms within the forms of writing. If the very capaciousness of eighteenth-century "literature" implicitly privileged the language of prose, Gray responded to that development by reworking the vernacular precisely in order to *estrangle it from itself*, to invent a kind of vernacular Latin. But this is also a question of whether and how literature comes to be estranged from the vernacular reading public, whose passion for novels calls into question the traditional hierarchy of literary forms and genres. This is a question which I should like to approach now by considering Wordsworth's critique of Gray's poetic diction, and Coleridge's response to that critique.

Lingua Communis and the Vernacular Canon

Gray was at the head of those who, by their reasonings, have attempted to widen the space of separation betwixt Prose and Metrical composition, and was more than any other man curiously elaborate in the structure of his own poetic diction.

—WORDSWORTH, Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* (1802)

In their respective engagements with Gray's *Elegy*, both Barbauld and Empson gain entry to the poem at the level of the *mise-en-scène*, by reference to an absence—the school. The absence of the school from the poem has perhaps been more than compensated by the importance of the poem to the school, by its "canonization." The absence of poetic diction from the *Elegy* is harder to see; it is visible as the unexpected transparency of the poem's language at the historical moment of its composition, the moment of a reactive "poetic diction." The fact that the hoary-headed swain and the melancholy poet speak exactly the same language, devoid of provincialism or obscurity, attests to the power of the new bourgeois sociolect to overcome resistance even within the generic stronghold of that resistance—the pastoral. Donald Davie and others have argued that eighteenth-century

poetry was for the most part very close to prose in its diction, and that the practice of diction was largely confined to the "descriptive" genres, including among them the increasingly archaic genre of pastoral.⁵⁷ By the time Johnson delivers his very negative judgment of pastoral in his *Rambler* essay, the genre appears to elicit a question about the proper language of poetry which would scarcely have been conceivable in the Renaissance:

Other writers, having the mean and despicable condition of a shepherd always before them, conceive it necessary to degrade the language of pastoral, by obsolete terms and rustic words, which they very learnedly call Dorick, without reflecting, that they thus become authors of a mingled dialect, which no human being ever could have spoken, that they may as well refine the speech as the sentiments of their personages, and that none of the inconsistencies which they endeavor to avoid, is greater than that of joining elegance of thought with coarseness of diction.⁵⁸

What Johnson considered "coarseness of diction"—the archaism that degrades Spenser's *Shepherd's Calendar* as well as the contemporary productions that follow the Spenserian model—is the equally "learned" complement of that artificial elevation of diction which in Johnson's own time was likely to characterize descriptive/topographical genres, and which descends stylistically from the idiosyncratic English of Milton rather than from the standardized prose of eighteenth-century letter-writing. Hence Johnson's condemnation of Milton's *Lycidas* looks like a condemnation of poetic diction before it can be said that pastoral (or any poetry) is peculiarly marked by such diction. Johnson's censure extends to any diction which deviates from what Davie calls "the tone of the center, a sort of urbanity," that is, the standard London-based vernacular which authorizes a single diction for both poetry and prose.

Davie makes the further point that "the tie between the writing of poetry and the writing of letters makes it possible, and necessary, to speak of Johnson's diction as bourgeois."⁵⁹ The descriptive/topographical genres stage the conflict between homogenizing and differentiating sociolinguistic forces by removing the site of linguistic practice to the country, while claiming at the same time a privileged overview of the social order, a universalizing perspective. This perspective always has a tendency to drift nostalgically toward the vantage of the landed aristocracy, who still hold sway from their country estates. But when the topographical genres incorporate the topoi of the pastoral genre, with its simple transposing of the noble/peasant distinction upon a far more complex social geography, a

surprising redirection of this nostalgia occurs: the return of pastoral in the later eighteenth century makes it possible to reground normative linguistic practice in what is thought to be the *actual* language of the peasantry. This is indeed what happens in the "antipastoral" of these later decades, and it is why the topographical genres never cease to be, in Empson's phrase, "covert pastoral." The reaction against the bourgeois sociolect that gives rise to poetic diction is therefore subject to another reaction that takes the form of a literalized pastoral diction; such a diction is described in John Aiken's 1772 essay on pastoral poetry as the folk source of the recognizably popular form of the ballad: "The rude original pastoral poetry of our country furnishes the first class of the popular pieces called ballads. Their language is the language of nature, simple and unadorned."⁶⁰ The imitation of rustic speech no longer attempts to reproduce the characteristics of dialect, then, but posits an aboriginal simplicity of rural language which has no real historical basis, and which can only be produced by imposing a new "simplicity" upon the now standardized language of polite letters. The literalization of pastoral speech is thus an unacknowledged idealization of the bourgeois sociolect; only in this context does Wordsworth's turn to such a simplified speech in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* appear to be something other than a mysterious and total rupture with eighteenth-century practice:

The principal object, then, which I proposed to myself in these Poems was to choose incidents and situations from common life, and to relate and describe them, as far as was possible, in a selection of language really used by men. . . . Low and rustic life was generally chosen, because in that condition, the essential passions of the heart find a better soil in which they can attain their maturity, are less under restraint, and speak a plainer, more emphatic language.⁶¹

A. D. Harvey has reminded us in his *English Literature in a Changing Society*, that despite the claims of his theory, Wordsworth's poetic practice was scarcely anomalous in its literary milieu. Wordsworth himself, in the Advertisement to the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads*, invokes the models of Burns and Cowper. Harvey argues that "the point Wordsworth was making was not that he was the first to have written inartificial poetry, but that he was the first deliberately and systematically to avoid poetic diction."⁶² In contrast to the Preface, the Advertisement describes his linguistic experiment as an attempt to "ascertain how far the language of conversation in the middle and lower classes of society is adapted to the purposes of poetic pleasure." The substitution of rustic language in the Preface for that of the

middle and lower classes gives us another version of pastoral, which functions as the means to produce a linguistic differentiation apparently the inverse of poetic diction's complication of polite speech. The fact that Wordsworth simplifies rather than complicates the common language nonetheless does not move his project generically beyond its precursors, however initially alienating his more rigorous linguistic experiments happen to be. Like Gray, he wishes to produce a different language—but by simplification rather than by complication. Not surprisingly, when Coleridge comes to examine Wordsworth's linguistic practice in *Lyrical Ballads*, he cannot detect its difference from the language of an ordinary, educated, middle-class person:

To this I reply: that a rustic's language, purified from all provincialism and grossness and so far reconstructed as to be made consistent with the rules of grammar . . . will not differ from the language of any other man of common-sense, however learned or refined he may be, except insofar as the notions which the rustic has to convey are fewer and more indiscriminate.⁶³

Coleridge identifies the logical crux of Wordsworth's argument as the principle of "selection" or "purification," which is supposed of itself to "form a distinction far greater than would at first be imagined, and will entirely separate the composition from the vulgarity and meanness of ordinary life." Wordsworth gives no example of the principle of selection at work, and only the vaguest sense of what is actually subtracted from the language really spoken by men ("purified indeed from what appears to be its real defects, from all lasting and rational causes of dislike or disgust"). Coleridge fairly questions whether this process can be undertaken upon any other basis than the real social difference produced by a literary education: "For the very power of making the selection implies the previous possession of the language selected. Or where can the poet have lived?" This poet is as mysteriously homeless as Gray's elegist. If Wordsworth really means by "selection" only the process of subtracting provincialisms, dialect expressions, or grammatical errors from the language of peasants, then one merely arrives again at the vernacular standard, the language of educated Londoners. Coleridge goes on to correct Wordsworth's slip by arguing that "For real we must substitute *ordinary*, or *lingua communis*." But this correction does not explain why Wordsworth substituted "rustic" for "common" language in the first place.

If the new language of poetry turns out to be nothing other than the language of the educated middle-class, a distinction without a difference, this

sort of distinction complicates another important article in Wordsworth's manifesto: "There neither is, nor can be, any essential difference between the language of prose and the language of metrical composition." The distinction between poetry and prose depends in only a minor way on the fact of meter, which Wordsworth recommends for its superaddition of pleasure to the matter of poetry, and secondarily for its capacity to moderate the effects of strong emotions. These virtues do not in themselves seem sufficient to claim for poetry a higher status than prose, but Wordsworth does implicitly make such a claim by transferring the hierarchical burden of the distinction onto the character of the poet, whose refined sensibility reproduces the aristocrat's, but in the register of sensibility alone. These claims are very well known and I will not rehearse them here. I propose instead to set them in a generic context by reading the poet of the Preface as the protagonist of a submerged pastoral narrative. This poet is "distinguished from other men" but not linguistically; he moves among them as though he were one of them, speaking their language, and he only signals his difference by the choice of meter, the signal or signature of the poetic sensibility. Such a narrative not only reinscribes the major topos of Renaissance pastoral—the poet as peasant—it engages as well the specific problematic of Gray's *Elegy*: the socially distinct character of the poet threatened with effacement or obscurity in the very identification of his language with the language of the rustics. Thus Wordsworth fears that his readers "will look round for poetry, and will be induced to inquire by what species of courtesy these attempts can be permitted to assume that title." The threat of *indifference* is necessarily expressed as the failure of a social distinction, but this fact only brings to the surface the same fear that underlies the topos of the "mute, inglorious Milton." For Wordsworth to fail in producing what his readers will recognize as "poetry" would indeed condemn him to the state of being mute and inglorious. The narrative motifs of the *Elegy* are close enough to Wordsworth's own at this point to undermine Wordsworth's stigmatizing of Gray as the representative of an overthrown poetic practice. If the Preface secretly reproduces the *Elegy's* narrative structure, Wordsworth can only acknowledge this fact obliquely by singling out Gray's sonnet on the death of Richard West as his chief example of obsolete poetic diction. The Preface's epitaph for poetic diction stands in for that other epitaphic poem, the *Elegy* itself, as its *misplaced* gravestone.

Coleridge is again the best critic of Wordsworth's Preface, because his quite logical objections to the Preface have the effect of exposing the structure of Wordsworth's argument as a narrative logic, specifically the logic of covert pastoral. Further, by pointing up the arbitrariness of Wordsworth's assignment of some lines of Gray's sonnet to poetic diction (1–5; 9–12),

some to the language of prose (6–8; 13–14), he is able to argue for the desirability of a poetic diction purged of the hackneyed "schoolboy image[s]" such as are supposed to blemish Gray's sonnet: "I write in meter because I am about to use a language different from that of prose." This language is intrinsically and justifiably elevated even in such particulars as the choice, for the sake of meter, between the voiced and unvoiced "e" in "beloved." The concrete linguistic object is reinstated as the bearer of difference, and the character of the poet is reduced to logical irrelevance; it was after all only the displacement of a difference which has no other mode of being than the written text. I would hasten to add, however, that while the mythology of the poetic character has an obvious social force, it is only the force lent it by the preexistent social distinction between aristocrat and commoner. All social differentiation, even the most narcissistic of small differences, continues to be modeled on this distinction, and in this way the back door is left open for pastoral. It has been worth briefly recapitulating the dialogue between Wordsworth and Coleridge in order to make just this point: In the absence of a poetic diction, the distinction between poetry and prose must be maintained elsewhere, as an assertion of the difference embodied in the poetic sensibility. But that the distinction requires such a speculative theory to defend against the threat of indifference implies that the generic differences between poetry and prose have already been seriously eroded; and indeed, as A. D. Harvey has shown, poetic production at the dawn of the century is increasingly modified generically by the copresence of prose genres, prime among them the Gothic novel. Wordsworth's earlier poetry is in retrospect generically homogeneous with the poems of Cowper or Campbell, and the real generic break occurs with the Gothic poetic narratives of Scott and Byron. In Bakhtin's terms, Romantic poetry then becomes subject to the pressure of novelization, a pressure against which Wordsworth reacts by a programmatic co-optation of the language of prose rather than by an intensified poetic diction.

It should be possible to demonstrate now that the distinction between poetic diction and the *lingua communis* is really determined by a generic distinction—between poetic genres and prose genres. The fact that this distinction was conceived by Wordsworth in exclusively linguistic terms is the index of a crisis, specifically a crisis in the history of vernacular canon formation. For the first time poetic genres and prose genres are comparable as *literary* genres; this point is immediately evident when we consider how difficult it is in the eighteenth century to conceptualize prose genres at all. One recalls in this context Johnson's attempt to conceive the fictions we now call "novels" under the category of "comic romance," a generic designation that would derive them from the vernacular entertainments of the

late medieval courts; these entertainments were subjected to High Culture norms (that is poetic norms) in the early modern period. Hence Johnson can argue that such fictions are "to be conducted by the rules of comic poetry."⁶⁴ The difficulty of conceptualizing prose genres is intelligible in light of the fact that genres had always historically been categories of poetics: the earliest classical genres were simply distinctions between kinds of meter. New generic categories of prose are conceived in the later eighteenth century only because a sufficient amount of pressure exists to produce such categories after the fact, after they have already become paradigmatic for the *sermo urbanus* of both the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy.

We are now in a position to look at a simple fact about Wordsworth's Preface, with some understanding of why this fact is difficult to place in its proper context: The "real language of men" and the "language of prose" are *equivalent terms* in Wordsworth's argument, but they are by no means obviously or necessarily the same thing. "Prose" is a practice of writing, and it is only the bourgeois gentleman's learned error to think that conversation is prose. Wordsworth's embrace of prose as the language really spoken by men represents a compromise between his distaste for a clichéd poetic diction and his disdain for the taste of the public that neglects canonical works in favor of ephemeral novels, plays, and novel-like narrative poems:

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. The invaluable works of our elder writers, I had almost said of Shakespeare and Milton, are driven into neglect by frantic novels, sickly and stupid German Tragedies, and deluges of idle and extravagant stories in verse.

The terms of Wordsworth's sociological analysis are in some respects superior to the terms of his poetics. The relation between the canonical form of literature (in the narrow sense) and the social constitution of the literate public appears to Wordsworth as a crisis, as the threatened disappearance of an audience for High Culture productions; a Milton unread is a mute,

inglorious Milton. But the hypothesis of a vanishing audience for canonical poetry is better understood as a misrecognition of a division within the reading public—between an elite readership for High Culture works (for whom poetic works still have the greatest cultural status) and a larger general reading public for whom the novel becomes the primary object of literary consumption. The point, however, is that the *language* of the novel and the *language* of poetry are at this moment still virtually indistinct. It is this indistinction of language which Wordsworth unwittingly confirms in defending the language of prose, at the same time that he condemns the new reading public for neglecting poetry. When this new reading public appears, it becomes necessary to say that henceforth the domain of literary production is effectively cleft in two, and that some contemporary works will be *read differently* because they descend generically from High Canonical works. If we are rehearsing here the distinction between "serious" and "popular" literature, it should be emphasized that this distinction does not merely replicate the long-standing distinction between High Culture and Low Culture forms of writing; such a distinction was always available in the difference between the major poetic genres and, say, ballads, broadsides etc. What is new here is the distinction between serious and popular *literature*—a distinction between two bodies of writing which are alike in respect of being equally "fictional" or "imaginative," equally distinguishable from philosophy or history, but *unlike in value*. For the moment, this value distinction can be registered as the distinction between poetry and prose, a hierarchy of literary genres that concedes to poetry an unquestioned generic superiority. Yet it is the very failure of poetry to produce a definitive new *Hochsprache* on the basis of its generic superiority which will ultimately make it necessary to conceptualize a category of "literature" inclusive even of the novel. The same failure is the condition for the crisis-rhetoric which confronts the question of "what is poetry" not as a traditional problem of poetics but as a problem of linguistics, of poetry as a distinct language, the vernacular's own Latin.

If the prose genres continue to function paradigmatically to produce the standard vernacular, this does not mean that poetic diction is doomed to extinction as a peculiar written dialect which no one speaks. Coleridge understood very well that the life of this dialect was sustained by the schools, just as it was originally produced by the institutional lag between Latin and vernacular literacy. One cannot improve upon this analysis:

this style of poetry which I have characterized above as translations of prose thoughts into poetic language had been kept up by, if it did not wholly arise from, the custom of writing Latin

verses and the great importance attached to these exercises in our public schools. Whatever might have been the case in the fifteenth century, when the use of the Latin tongue was so general among learned men that Erasmus is said to have forgotten his native language; yet in the present day it is not to be supposed that a youth can think in Latin, or that he can have any other reliance on the force or fitness of his phrases but the authority of the author. Consequently he must first prepare his thoughts and then pick out from Virgil, Horace, Ovid, or perhaps more compendiously, from his *Gradus*, halves and quarters of lines in which to embody them.⁶⁵

Coleridge credits Wordsworth with suggesting this line of thought to him; and indeed, these remarks recover a genealogy of poetic diction far more accurate than the mythological narrative Wordsworth offers in his Appendix to *Lyrical Ballads*, and which backdates poetic diction to a prehistoric era. For whatever reasons, and no doubt they have their own interest, Wordsworth is not able in the Preface to acknowledge the institutional relations of the poet who is produced as a literate subject by the school; such a disavowal in its many subsequent forms has condemned literary history to misrecognize these relations as the mere taint of academicism clinging to lesser talents. In fact it does not seem possible to eradicate poetic diction so long as the poetic genres continue to claim generic superiority, and hence poetic diction can be resurrected as, for example, the inherent "difficulty" of modern poetry. In the same way the classroom practice of prose composition has now produced a prose diction in the form of an invidious distinction between the norms of writing and the norms of conversation. It is pointless at this date to deny that these linguistic effects are produced by anything other than the interaction of literary production with the pedagogy of the schools. The language of the school is always a *literary* language, the language produced by the formal study of canonical texts.

In retrospect we can say that the virtual indifference of poetic and prose diction in the earlier eighteenth century (Davie's ideal "purity of diction") represents a historically unique moment. Purity of diction requires the participation of nearly all writing genres in the forging of a standard vernacular, in other words, a linguistically homogeneous bourgeois public sphere. When the successful dissemination of the standard permits production in genres which have no canonical authorization, but which are nevertheless unimpeachable vehicles of polite speech, a canonical crisis arises in the form of an anxious discrimination of "serious" from "popular" writing. Wordsworth can conjure an apocalyptic scenario in which the works

of Milton and Shakespeare are swallowed up in the sea of popular writing only because the distinction between serious and popular genres produces no corresponding linguistic differentiation within the reading public. The language of Radcliffe and Scott is as pure and correct as the language of the poets, but this condition does not obtain indefinitely. The division of literary production into "literature" and the genres which are by definition subliterary or nonliterary does eventually produce a corresponding linguistic distinction when genres are distributed by the curricula of the educational institution in order to separate them out according to the *levels* of the system. Already in the early nineteenth century certain "popular" works are relegated to the lower levels of the system, other "serious" works to the higher, and this sorting out across the vertical structure of the educational system, initially very modest, is gradually more marked over the succeeding century and a half.⁶⁶ As the school becomes the exclusive agent for the dissemination of High Canonical works, replacing the quasi-educational institutions, the coffeehouses, literary clubs, and salons of eighteenth-century literacy—the realm of the bourgeois public sphere—the prestige of literary works as cultural capital is assessed according to the *limit* of their dissemination, their relative exclusivity. When a finite set of genres becomes the supergenre of "literature," all canonical works can be regarded as exemplifying a language essentially different from the language spoken by "real men," namely, "literary language." But from the vantage of the *longue durée*, "literary language" is nothing other than the successor to poetic diction, the reduction of all literature to a written language which produces a difference in speech, a social distinction, among those who have access to this second language through the schools. The theory of "literary language" is indeed our poetics, even when that language appears in prose, as the "literariness" of literary prose. The fact that it is still possible to speak of the intrinsic difference between literary language and ordinary language is a measure of how successfully the conservators of literature have erased its origins even in the act of writing its history.

this alliance of Jacobean writing and spoken Black English has produced the only public oratory (or "rhetoric") we know today, in comparison with which our public speakers of Standard English barely evince any rhetorical skills at all. In this context see Ishmael Reed's apposite comment on the misuse of Standard English by white politicians (and why it does not matter to the distribution of political power), in "How Not to Get the Infidel to Talk the King's Talk," in *The State of the Language*, ed. Leonard Michaels and Christopher Ricks (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 180-81.

Chapter Two

¹Leslie Stephen, *Hours in a Library* (London: Smith, Elder, 1909), 97. Stephen raises the issue to be considered presently, of the effect of banality: "The Bard" and the lines upon Eton have become so hackneyed as perhaps to acquire a certain tinge of banality."

²Edmund Gosse, *Gray*, The English Men of Letters Series (New York: Harper, 1882).

³I note that "The Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard" is an item in the list which defines E. D. Hirsch's concept of cultural literacy. See his *Cultural Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), 169. Thomas Gray's name, however, does not appear on the list.

⁴A discussion of the form and contents of Gray's commonplace books may be found in Roger Martin, *Essai sur Thomas Gray* (London: Oxford University Press, 1934), 187-200.

⁵R. P. Gillies, *Memories*, 1851, II, 165, quoted in the annotation to Johnson's *Life of Gray, Lives of the English Poets*, ed. George Hill, 3 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1905), 2:441.

⁶The importance of the "notebook" in early modern education is stressed by R. R. Bolgar, in his *The Classical Heritage and Its Beneficiaries*, 272ff. Bolgar quotes the detailed instructions of Vivès: "make a book of blank leaves of a proper size. Divide it into certain topics, so to say, nests. In one, jot down the names of subjects of daily converse . . . in another, sententiae" (237). In this context see also the invaluable discussion of Terence Cave, *The Cornucopian Text: Problems of Writing in the French Renaissance* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1979), which elaborates more than I am able here upon the difference writing makes to the mnemotechniques of the "commonplace." For a useful discussion of commonplace books in the early modern period, see Ruth Mohl, *Milton and His Commonplace Book* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1969), 11-30.

⁷Johnson, *Lives of the English Poets*, 1:77.

⁸The connection between property and landscape painting was suggested by John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972), 106. The relation between enclosure and landscape in literature is briefly discussed by James Turner, *The Politics of Landscape: Rural Scenery and Society in English Poetry, 1630-1660* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1979), 124ff., and extensively in John Barrell's *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place, 1730-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), from which I would extract the following key

statements: "because of their dependence on the sort of techniques of organizing and composing landscape that I have been discussing, the cultivated classes in England felt much more at ease, in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, in landscape which had been enclosed" (32). And: "The effect, far from suggesting any sense of locality, instead serves to show that one locality . . . can be treated in much the same way as another, in that it can be persuaded to illustrate the same rhetorical commonplaces." I propose that the effect of generality in locodescriptive poetry is precisely the reinhabiting of the emptied "common" by the rhetorical commonplace. The process of enclosure is discussed at length by Barrell, 64ff.

⁹*The Complete Poetical Works of James Thomson*, ed. J. Logie Robertson (London: Oxford University Press, 1908).

¹⁰John Barrell, *An Equal, Wide Survey: English Literature in History, 1730-1780* (London: Hutchinson, 1983).

¹¹See, for example, "Summer," 1438ff. for Thomson's survey of English literature.

¹²William Empson, *Some Versions of Pastoral* (New York: New Directions, 1950), 4.

¹³For the concept of interpellation, the "hailing" of the subject in ideology, see Louis Althusser, *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 170ff.

¹⁴I. A. Richards, *Practical Criticism: A Study of Literary Judgment* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1929), 197.

¹⁵Frank Brady, "Gray's Elegy: Structure and Meaning," in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Gray's Elegy* ed. Herbert W. Starr (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968).

¹⁶Roy Porter, *English Society in the Eighteenth Century* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1982), 65, cites a typical statement of Defoe's: "Men are every day starting up from obscurity to wealth." The question of social mobility is no longer a simple one, if it ever was, and I must therefore add the following qualifications. Historians are now inclined to emphasize a disparity between the perception of upward mobility and the actual rate at which this mobility occurred. Doubtless if one confines the definition of mobility to actual examples of the bourgeoisie passing into the ranks of the nobility, the numbers of those passing, as Lawrence Stone has demonstrated in *The Open Elite: England 1540-1880* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), are relatively small. Stone biases his study by constricting his definition of the ruling elite to the landed country "squirearchy," and he is thus able to conclude that the "perennial openness of England's landed elite to penetration by members of newly enriched bourgeoisie is clearly no more than a hoary myth." Now this statistical revisionism is based upon what can only be an arbitrary judgment about precisely what minimum number of aristocratized bourgeois would qualify the elite as "open." Setting aside the question of whether this use of statistics is not intended to confound the very possibility of a class analysis, one may at least argue that the perception of upward mobility, which was ubiquitous and even hysterical in the eighteenth century, is a real event with real historical consequences. For a somewhat different analysis than Stone's, see Peter Laslett's *The World We Have*

Lost (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965). The perception of upward mobility is related to the demonstrable imitation of aristocratic manners by the professional middle classes and the haute bourgeoisie. The concept of upward mobility therefore cannot be confined to the actual expansion of the landed elite: its site is rather the cultural homogenization of the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie, which Auerbach describes in the literary/linguistic sphere. Here the evidence Stone himself collects suggests the cardinal importance of education in this process of homogenization (27, 408), particularly the significance of the professional middle classes, the "middling sort," who were more easily capable of acquiring the knowledge and manners of the aristocracy than of acquiring vast landed capital. It is this version of social mobility which is crucial to the present argument.

¹⁷In this context, consider the "commonplace" statement of Edward Young, *Conjectures on Original Composition* (1759), ed. Edith J. Morley (London: Longmans, Green, 1918): "Many a genius, probably, there has been, which could neither write, nor read" (17).

¹⁸John Barrell, *An Equal Wide Survey*, 119.

¹⁹See James Bowen, *A History of Western Education*, 3 vols. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1972), 1:138ff. For a general discussion of this subject, see also John Lawson and Harold Silver, *A Social History of Education in England* (New York: Methuen, 1973) 193ff. They note that the lending libraries were initially opposed by the Anglican clergy (236).

²⁰John Barrell, *An Equal Wide Survey* (140), points out that eighteenth-century English grammars were designed as much to limit as to disseminate knowledge of language. On the matter of education for the working class, see R. K. Webb's discussion of Hannah More and the SPCK, in his *The British Working Class Reader* (New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1971), 25ff. On the monitorial system, see Karen Jones and Kevin Williamson, "The Birth of the Schoolroom," *Ideology and Consciousness* 6 (1979), 59–110. On the relation of the middle class to newer developments in education, see Brian Simon, *Studies in the History of Education, 1780–1870* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1960), 107ff.

²¹Bowen, *A History of Western Education*, 3:138ff.

²²John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), in *The Educational Writings of John Locke*, ed. James L. Axtell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), 268.

²³Bowen, *A History of Western Education*, 3:139.

²⁴Nicholas Hans, *New Trends in Education in the Eighteenth Century* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951): "By the end of the eighteenth century, classical education had become simply a sign of social prestige." Hans discusses the revival of the grammar schools and the classical curriculum in the nineteenth century—that is, the revival of aristocratic caste traits—when the objectives of social emulation were no longer satisfied by vernacular literacy.

²⁵I am following here the excellent discussion of Richard D. Altick, *The English Common Reader: A Social History of the Mass Reading Public, 1800–1900* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957), 42ff.

²⁶One recalls in this context the characteristic rhetoric of Dryden's evaluative

criticism, for example, this passage from the "Defense of the Epilogue," in *Of Dramatic Poesy and Other Critical Essays*, 2 vols, ed. George Watson (London: Dutton, 1962): "But malice and partiality set apart, let any man who understands English read diligently the works of Shakespeare and Fletcher; and I undertake that he will find in every page either some solecism of speech, or some notorious flaw in sense" (1:171). This problem is accurately characterized by Richard Foster Jones, *The Triumph of the English Language: A Survey of Opinions Concerning the Vernacular from the Introduction of Printing to the Restoration* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1953): "The Elizabethans had sought to make their language eloquent rather than grammatical" (283).

²⁷John Barrell, *An Equal Wide Survey*, 34.

²⁸*Ibid.*, 36. Barrell quotes Steele's generalizing statement, to the effect that a gentleman is "a Man completely qualify'd as well for the Service and Good, as for the Ornament and Delight, of Society." See also Barrell's discussion beginning 133ff., as well as Stone's comment on the effects of education, in his *The Open Elite*, 411. For a nuanced discussion of the "class of the polite," see Susan Staves, "Pope's Refinement," *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation* 29 (1988): 145–63.

²⁹Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: New Left Books, 1983), 74.

³⁰Quoted in Johnson's *Life of Gray*, 3:430.

³¹Thomas Sheridan, *British Education: Or the Source of the Disorders of Great Britain* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1970), 180, 192.

³²This agenda is quite specific in Sheridan's work, which seeks to institute the "study of oratory" as a politically oriented practice on the model of "Athens and Rome."

³³Herbert McLachlan, *English Education Under the Test Acts* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1931), 216. In a recent study, *The Pristine Culture of Capitalism: A Historical Essay on Old Regimes and Modern States* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 82, Ellen Meiksins Wood remarks how narrow this linguistic practice could be: "Britain is certainly not alone among European nations to identify social classes by means of differential sound patterns in their habits of speech. But it is perhaps distinctive in the extent to which sound patterns, the conventions of pronunciation, predominate over other linguistic criteria of social difference."

³⁴Wood, *The Pristine Culture of Capitalism*, 216.

³⁵William Enfield, ed. *The Speaker: or Miscellaneous Pieces, Selected from the Best English Writers, and disposed under proper heads, with a view to facilitate the improvement of youth in reading and speaking* (London: Joseph Johnson, 1774).

³⁶The significance of middle-class women in this movement has been recently stressed by Nancy Armstrong, "Literature as Women's History," *Genre* 19 (Winter 1986), 367: "Today few of us realize that many features of our standard humanities curriculum came from a curriculum designed specifically for educating polite young women who were not of the ruling class, or that the teaching of native British literature developed as a means of socializing children, the poor, and foreigners before we became a masculine profession." Barbauld was uniquely privileged in her

educational opportunities (she even persuaded her father, Dr. Aiken, to teach her Latin and Greek), although she was not an advocate of schools for women. She seems to have promoted instead the more unofficial instruments of literary culture as a means of disseminating knowledge to women.

³⁷See Terence Cave's comment on Ciceronian topics in *The Cornucopian Text*, 13.

³⁸*The Poems of Thomas Gray, William Collins, Oliver Goldsmith*, ed. Roger Lonsdale (London: Longmans, 1969), 126.

³⁹George T. Wright, "Stillness and the Argument of Gray's 'Elegy,'" *Modern Philology* 74 (1977), 382.

⁴⁰For a brief account of Old Corruption, see Philip Corrigan and Derek Sayer, *The Great Arch: English State Formation as Cultural Revolution* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987). We might contextualize Gray's ignoble/noble strife here by pointing also to the *libelles* of the French underground press, which actively delegitimized the French nobility in the decades before the revolution. Robert Darnton writes in *The Literary Underground of the Old Regime* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 29: "The *grand monde* was the real target of the *libelles*. They slandered the court, the church, the aristocracy, the academies, the salons, everything elevated and respectable, including the monarchy itself, with a scurrility that is difficult to imagine today, although it has a long career in underground literature." Similarly, the ethico-satiric productions of English High Culture sublimate Grub Street productions by the same techniques of "normalization" to which Gray's classical sources are subjected. Darnton's study is quite pertinent to the general argument of this essay, though it would lead us to an account of how differently the nationalizing of French literature proceeds. Darnton notes in passing that the Académie Française restricted literary immortality to "forty privileged individuals" (21). For a recent consideration of "Grub Street," as this notion is mystified by the distinction between High and Low Culture, see Kathy Macdermott, "Literature and the Grub Street Myth," in *Popular Fictions: Essays in Literature and History*, ed. Peter Humm et al. (London: Methuen, 1986), 16-28.

⁴¹Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 72, 77.

⁴²For a discussion of this and other Theocritean topoi, see Thomas G. Rosenmeyer, *The Green Cabinet: Theocritus and the European Pastoral Lyric* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969), 105.

⁴³See Arnold's Romantic reading of Gray's career, "Thomas Gray," in *The Complete Prose Works of Matthew Arnold*, 11 vols. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1973), 9:189-204.

⁴⁴This question has been unfortunately confused in some critical accounts by the invention of another character, the "stonecutter," who is presumably the youth who dies at the end of the poem. The present argument declines this hypothesis without resorting to a simplistic biographical reading. For the "stonecutter controversy," see the essays by Herbert W. Starr, Frank H. Ellis, and John H. Sutherland collected in Starr, *Twentieth Century Interpretations of Gray's Elegy*.

⁴⁵John Sitter, *Literary Loneliness in Mid-Eighteenth Century England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), Chap. 3.

⁴⁶See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Burger (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1989).

⁴⁷Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process*, volume 2: *Power and Civility*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978), 8 and passim.

⁴⁸On this subject see the recent article by Linda Zionkowski, "Bridging the Gulf Between: The Poet and the Audience in the Work of Gray," *ELH* 58 (1991), 331-50, which argues for Gray's reaction to the commodification of literature. I have provided below a slightly different (though not contradictory) context for Gray's characteristic posturing in the complex overlapping of poetry and literature, as categories of cultural production.

⁴⁹Waller, "Of English Verse," in *The Poems of Edmund Waller*, ed. G. Thorn Drury (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1893).

⁵⁰*The Works of Thomas Gray*, ed. Edmund Gosse, 4 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1903), 2:108.

⁵¹See Lonsdale, *The Poems of Gray, Collins, Goldsmith*, 113.

⁵²See Habermas's comment on this moment in the development of the English public sphere, in his *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*: "Two years after *Pamela* appeared on the literary scene the first public library was founded; book clubs, reading circles, and subscription libraries shot up. In an age in which the sale of the monthly and weekly journals doubled within a quarter century, as happened in England after 1750, they made it possible for the reading of novels to become customary in the bourgeois strata. These constituted the public that had long since grown out of early institutions like the coffee houses, *salons*, and *Tischgesellschaften* and was now held together through the medium of the press and its professional criticism" (51).

⁵³Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 47.

⁵⁴John Hill Burton, *The Life and Correspondence of David Hume*, 3 vols. (New York: Garland Publishing), 3:28.

⁵⁵On peasant poets, see Morag Shiach, *Discourse on Popular Culture* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 35-70.

⁵⁶Jerome Christensen, *Practicing Enlightenment: Hume and the Formation of a Literary Career* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), 49.

⁵⁷See Geoffrey Tillotson, "Eighteenth Century Poetic Diction I," in his *Essays in Criticism and Research* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1942), 69. In the following paragraphs I take up some reflections of Donald Davie, *Purity of Diction in English Verse* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), 202.

⁵⁸Johnson, in *Rambler*, No. 37. In *The Rambler*, ed. Walter Jackson Bate, 3 vols. (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1969), 1:202.

⁵⁹Davie, *Purity of Diction*, 13. For an interesting longer view of the significance of prose, see Jeffrey Kittay and Wlad Godzich, *The Emergence of Prose: An Essay in Prosaics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987).

⁶⁰John Aiken, "Essay on Ballads and Pastoral Songs" (1793), quoted in *A Book of English Verse*, ed. John Barrell and John Bull (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), 435. One might remark here on a certain tension between the nationalist agenda carried by the forging of a vernacular standard and the invention of "traditions," the latter manifested by the movement to collect specimens of the earliest English poetry (Percy's *Reliques*, for example). This tension might be described as the difference between the cultural value of the bourgeois sociolect and the ideological value of "authentic" English dialect; perhaps the hypothetical grounding of the bourgeois sociolect in peasant speech was one way of resolving this tension.

⁶¹In *Wordsworth's Literary Criticism*, ed. W. J. B. Owen (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974).

⁶²A. D. Harvey, *English Poetry in a Changing Society, 1780–1825* (London: Alison and Busby, 1980), 66.

⁶³Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. George Watson (New York: Dutton, 1971).

⁶⁴Johnson, in *Rambler*, No. 4, in Bate, *The Rambler*, 3:19.

⁶⁵Coleridge's mention of the "Gradus" betrays the impact of vernacular literacy upon the Latin grammar school itself, since students there are no longer so immersed in classical literature as to be able to practice composition without the aid of already compiled commonplace texts.

⁶⁶Since the High Culture canon is for us a given of higher education, its relation to "juvenile" literature—which no less than "great" works has a history of canon formation in the schools—has been unfortunately obscured. I would like to open up the question of this other canon, if it cannot be thoroughly explored here, by invoking some of the names in its pantheon (randomly selected): O. Henry, Ambrose Bierce, Washington Irving, Richard Connell (author of "The Most Dangerous Game"), Edgar Allan Poe, James Thurber, Robert Louis Stevenson, John Masefield, Carl Sandburg, Edwin Arlington Robinson, A. E. Housman, Amy Lowell, Robert Frost. The fact that some of these names appear in the High Culture canon is an interesting, not an invalidating, complication of the present thesis. Gray's "Elegy" is itself an example of this dual citizenship, since it has so frequently been taught at the primary and secondary levels.

Chapter Three

¹Francis Mulhern, *The Moment of Scrutiny* (London: New Left Books, 1979); Chris Baldick, *The Social Mission of English Criticism, 1848–1942* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

²T. S. Eliot, *Selected Essays* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Javonovich, 1932), 392; hereafter cited as SE in the text.

³Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, 164.

⁴Mulhern, *The Moment of Scrutiny*, 35ff.

⁵T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in *The Sacred Wood* (London: Methuen, 1920; 1960), 50; hereafter cited as SW in the text.

⁶See also Eliot's "Poetry and Drama," in his *On Poetry and Poets* (New York:

Farrar, Strauss, and Cudahy, 1957): "Reviewing my critical output for the last thirty-odd years, I am surprised to find how constantly I have returned to the drama" (75). Further references cited as OPP in text.

⁷A particular passage of Eliot's is worth noting in "What Is a Classic?" OPP: "The predecessors should be themselves great and honoured: but their accomplishment must be such as to suggest still undeveloped resources of the language, and not such as to oppress the younger writers with the fear that everything that can be done has been done, in their language" (58).

⁸There is an additional motive to be mentioned in this connection—Eliot's unhappy feeling that religious poetry will always be regarded as minor: "For the great majority of people who love poetry, religious poetry is a variety of *minor* poetry" ("Religion and Literature," SE, 345).

⁹T. S. Eliot, *John Dryden: The Poet, the Dramatist, the Critic* (New York: T. and E. Holiday, 1932), 24.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, 5.

¹¹See also Eliot's remark in "Virgil and the Christian World," OPP: "A poet may believe that he is expressing only his private experience; his lines may be for him only a means of talking about himself without giving himself away; yet for his readers what he has written may come to be the expression both of their own secret feelings and of the exultation or despair of a generation" (137).

¹²T. S. Eliot, "The Classics and the Man of Letters," in *To Criticize the Critic* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1965), 147.

¹³T. S. Eliot, *After Strange Gods: A Primer of Modern Heresy* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1933), 22.

¹⁴T. S. Eliot, *The Idea of a Christian Society* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1940), 26.

¹⁵On the decline of the "bourgeois public sphere," see Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, 141ff.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, 42.

¹⁷T. S. Eliot, *Christianity and Culture* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1968), 99.

¹⁸T. S. Eliot, *The Idea of a Christian Society*, 34. Eliot goes on to associate, as well as to distinguish, his notion from the Coleridgean idea of the "clerisy," but the very fact that Eliot takes such care with his relation to Coleridge on this issue suggests that there is much more continuity than Eliot would like to acknowledge between Romantic notions about the function of literary culture and his fantasy of a Christian culture.

¹⁹See Edward W. Said, *The World, the Text, and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 290–92.

²⁰Gerald Graff, *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 145ff.

²¹Robert Penn Warren, "A Conversation with Cleanth Brooks," in *The Possibilities of Order: Cleanth Brooks and His Work*, ed. Lewis P. Simpson (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1976), 19.

²²Cleanth Brooks, *Modern Poetry and the Tradition* (Chapel Hill: University of