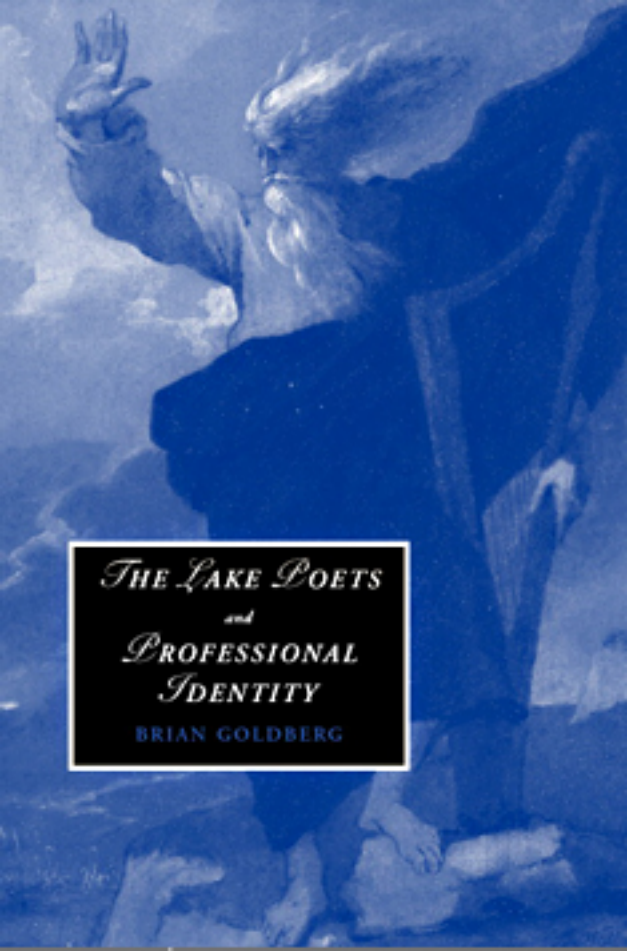

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THE LAKE POETS AND PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

The idea that the inspired poet stands apart from the marketplace is considered central to British Romanticism. However, Romantic authors were deeply concerned with how their occupation might be considered a kind of labor comparable to that of the traditional professions. In the process of defining their work as authors, Wordsworth, Southey, and Coleridge – the ''Lake school'' – aligned themselves with emerging constructions of the ''professional gentleman'' that challenged the vocational practices of late eighteenth-century British culture. They modeled their idea of authorship on the learned professions of medicine, church, and law, which allowed them to imagine a productive relationship with the marketplace and to adopt the ways eighteenth-century poets had related their poetry to other kinds of intellectual work. Brian Goldberg explores the ideas of professional risk, evaluation, and competition that the writers developed as a response to a variety of eighteenth-century depictions of the literary career.

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BRIAN GOLDBERG

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Introduction: Professionalism and the Lake School of Poetry

When William Wordsworth, Robert Southey, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge – the Lake school – formulated their earliest descriptions of the role of the poet, two models of vocational identity exerted special pressure on their thinking. One was the idea of the professional gentleman. In their association of literary composition with socially useful action, their conviction that the judgment of the poet should control the literary marketplace, and their efforts to correlate personal status with the poet's special training, the Lake writers modified a progressive version of intellectual labor that was linked, if sometimes problematically, to developments in the established professions of medicine, church, and law. In short, they attempted to write poetry as though writing poetry could duplicate the functions of the professions. The other model, and it is related to the first, is literary. Like the Lake poets, earlier eighteenth-century authors had been stimulated, if occasionally frustrated, by the puzzle of how to write poetry in the face of changing conceptions of intellectual work. While ideals of medical, legal, and theological effectiveness that measured ''technique'' were competing with those that emphasized ''character,'' literary production was moving (more slowly and less completely than is sometimes thought) from a patronage- to a market-based model.[1] Eighteenth-century writers developed a body of figural resources such as the poetic wanderer that responded to new constructions of experience, merit, and evaluation, and the Lake writers seized on these resources in order to describe their own professional situation.

To invoke the concept of the ''professional'' in this context is to allude to a number of separate issues. Kant's declaration that ''beautiful art . . . must not be a matter of remuneration''

participates in a centuries-long insistence that virtue is dependent on leisure, whereas authors motivated by an ''abject devotion to their private interests,'' as Isaac Disraeli puts it, ''like Atalanta, for the sake of the apples of gold, lose the glory of the race.''[2] Critics interested in the historical fortunes of this idea have found that the eighteenth century, with its growing consumer economy and expanding book trade, is a crucial developmental period.[3] By the end of the century, as Roger Chartier describes the situation, there has emerged a ''somewhat paradoxical connection'' between a ''desired professionalization,'' meaning the possibility of earning a living through writing, and ''an ideology of literature founded on the radical autonomy of the work of art and the disinterestedness of the creative act.''[4] Romantic theories that replace didactic or effect-oriented ''instrumentalism'' with art for its own sake may be understood as a reaction to market conditions, which is to say, as Martha Woodmansee does, that there is an ''interest'' in ''disinterestedness'': ''As literature became subject to a market economy, the instrumentalist theory ... was found to justify the wrong works,'' while theories of an autonomous aesthetic sphere justified imaginative writing that was rejected by the marketplace.[5]

The possibility I investigate here, however, is that Romantic authors had a more productive relationship to the idea of audience than rejection followed by reaction, and that the professional model offered a fruitful alternative to the hack and the brilliant recluse. To understate the case, it is not difficult to find Romantic writers explicitly distinguishing their own aims and motivations from commercial ones, but, it should be added, such accounts often come in close proximity to other kinds of concerns. When, in one of his 1802 letters to the gentleman-poet William Sotheby, Coleridge declares that his ''*true Call* to the Ministry of *Song*'' gives him confidence in the face of criticism, his sense of vocation and the intellectual independence his ministry entails are forcefully expressed. Nobody ministers in isolation, however, and Coleridge follows up by joking about the money his publisher has lost on his recent translation of *Wallenstein*: ''I am sure, that Longman never thinks of me ... but the ghosts of his departed Guineas dance an ugly Waltz round my idea.''[6] The ministry of song is logically separable from the dance of the ghostly guineas, but professionalism, which allows disinterest to coexist with the world of business, brings Coleridge's rhetorical performances into a single line.

Chartier's ''somewhat paradoxical connection'' between being free and working for pay is not necessarily a paradox, any more than it is only an associative accident for Coleridge to mention his prophetic call at the same time that he dwells upon his latest adventure in publication. The poet sings, but money dances, and sometimes it dances away.

Although getting paid is only part of what the term ''professional'' means in this context, it is worth remembering that the Lake poets, especially when they were first orienting themselves towards their work, were either willing or felt compelled to associate authorship with remuneration. ''[Southey] knew that I published [*Lyrical Ballads*] for money and money alone,'' Wordsworth would complain in 1799, irked by Southey's unenthusiastic review of the volume. ''I care little for the praises of any other professional critic, but as it may help me to pudding.''[7] Southey had responded similarly, a few years earlier, to a qualified review of his own writing. ''Have you seen Bob Banyard's review of Joan of Arc? 'a professional man must not step too much out of his way' granted – ergo I abjure public poetry: but a professional man must have a house and furniture – ergo I must write a book first.''[8] The ''book'' Southey is laboring over is his Welsh epic *Madoc*, and as he mulls over his situation the poem's hero is pressed into un-princely service: ''Poor Madoc! If he will buy me chairs tables linens etc. etc. it will be worth more than an eternity of posthumous credit.''[9] A year later, Coleridge would propose that ''things necessary for the body'' should be purchased ''by the labour of the body, and things necessary for the mind by the labour of the mind,'' but he also laments that, ''Alas! this beautiful order of things, if not rendered impossible by the present state of society, is in most instances incompatible with our present state of education.''[10] ''The beautiful order of things'' imagined by Coleridge will require reform at the public and the personal level. Meanwhile, he has been employed as a freelance journalist, as a lecturer, and as a newspaper poet, and he has been preparing to take up a living as a preacher, a fate from which he has only been rescued by a timely annuity settled on him as a form of patronage.

It would be a mistake to imagine that, at such moments, the poets are merely displaying an opportunistic careerism, or in Coleridge's case a fatalism, that negates their other claims on

behalf of ''the ministry of song.'' It is important, for example, to distinguish between ''publishing'' and ''writing.'' Wordsworth may state that he publishes only for money, but he allows the composition of poetry to stem from a diviner impulse. A similar point may be made about Southey's plan to renounce ''public poetry'' once his identity as a professional man is established. It would remain acceptable, even desirable, to write privately, for a close circle of friends and relations. Of the three, Coleridge is most visibly torn between aesthetic idealism and the fallen world of work. Some writing is meant to be sold, for example the Wallenstein translation, but other works, the productions of ''Genius,'' express a kind of freedom which must be supported differently. ''Never pursue literature as a trade!'' Coleridge eventually advises, and he, like Southey, is imagining that a gentleman might establish a stable professional life that would enable leisurely, not trade-driven, composition.

Yet if it is difficult to understand these varied careers as expressions of a single-minded entrepreneurialism, it is equally hard to believe that the genteel retirement that an author such as Gray pursued, or the legal career he spent his life avoiding, would really have provided adequate or desirable shelter for the Lake poets' efforts. These writers measured themselves against their audiences, and against other professionals, from beginning to end. Further, although Wordsworth is the only member of the Lake school whose best achievements may unambiguously be located in his poetry, writing poetry was always, for all of them, the most valued exercise of the author's calling. Their collective effort may thus be considered an attempt to redeem the idea of professional work for the practice of poetry, an attempt that was sometimes frustrated but other times energised by what eighteenth-century intellectual work was actually turning into. Although the Lake poets court vocational failure and sometimes disaster, their writing has an optimistic and pragmatic core, which may be why, in addition to their irreducible formal gifts, they become such important models for the poets who follow them. Chatterton was believed to have poisoned himself, after all, and Gray's Bard leaps ''headlong'' into the ''roaring tide'' of the Conway River. In the work of Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey, on the other hand, the poet almost always gets out alive.

I YOUNG POETS, OLD PROFESSIONS

''Professionalism,'' then, is one name for the poets' relationship to their culture, and it frames their relationship to their immediate predecessors. Yet the central importance of the learned professions for these poets has remained under-examined. There have been valuable treatments of poets and individual professions, for example of Coleridge and medicine or, especially, Wordsworth and the law.[11] There have also been studies that use the category ''professionalism'' to describe an aspect of modernity in which Romantic writing is directly implicated. However, in order to understand the way these poets conceived of their actual work, it is also necessary to generalize about the other kinds of work they might have expected to do. While the category of ''authorship'' has undergone intensive scrutiny in the past thirty years, structuralist and discursive approaches have treated it as a complexly isolated reflection of other kinds of social relations. Recent discussions of copyright, for example, have advanced our sense of the legal contours of authorship, but, by design, they leave the nonspecific aspects of authorship unanalyzed.[12] In contrast, I argue that what Alan Liu calls the ''vocational imagination,'' which is an author's ''need to *place* [the work of writing] in the field of contemporary industry,'' is shaped by the ''ecology'' or the ''system'' of professional labor.[13] The ancient, learned professions that provided the basic template for professional identity, as well as other vocational groups that aspired to professional status, compete internally and externally for jurisdiction over tasks and problems of recognized importance, and they compete over the definitions of what successful solutions should look like.[14] For the Lake writers, poets are or should be a central part of this system, based on their training and their variously defined social mission. At a moment when differing versions of social order fill the air, some familiar metaphors – poet as prophet, poet as healer, poet as law-giver – turn out to have unpredictably literal referents.

Although the life-stories of the Lake poets have different textures, their early careers are defined by a common body of ''life-chances,'' a specific combination of material necessity and educational resources.[15] As young men, each was in need of a dependable source of income, and, pursuing a standard trajectory, each followed up on a grammar-school education with

attendance at Oxford or Cambridge. The differences among Wordsworth's rural Hawkshead, Southey's venerable Westminster, and Coleridge's charity school, Christ's Hospital, are thus partially ameliorated by the schools' preparatory function, which is exercised largely informally – as the career of Southey, ejected from Westminster but welcome at Balliol College, demonstrates. The writers were all intended by their families to enter the Church, a fact that bears directly on the ways they would describe the poetic profession, but other options were live at various times. In addition to their clerical prospects, Wordsworth also contemplated the law, and Coleridge and Southey both considered medicine. Further, the extra-professional jobs they imagined for themselves were based, by and large, on the education that suited them for the professions, and those options included work that was or would eventually become ''professional'' by many definitions: school teaching, tutoring, and journalism are central, and Coleridge's brief experience of military service, his pseudonymous enlistment in the Light Dragoons as ''Silas Tomkyn Comberbache,'' is anomalous from the point of view of history not because he became a soldier but because he did not enter the army as an officer.

Potential entry into the professions contributes greatly to the writers' sense of identity, but it also generates an ongoing act of resistance toward the old regime. Any profession could be expensive or time-consuming to prepare for – ''all professions have their inconveniencies,'' as Wordsworth would say.[16] More important, the perceived stability of the professions and their participation in the distributive dynamics of the establishment made them emblematic of old-style, oligarchic corruption. Coleridge's 1795 attack on Southey, shortly after the dissolution of Pantisocracy, is illustrative. Coleridge claims to be upset, not for his own sake, but on behalf of their partner George Burnett, who will be left without support now that the utopian community the men had been planning has been abandoned. As a radical intellectual with a short supply of cash, Burnett is financially as well as morally barred from the professions, Coleridge argues, even though professional work is the alternative for which his education has best suited him: ''He cannot go into the Church – for you did 'give him principles'! . . . . Nor can he go into the Law – for the same principles declare against it . . . for Law or Physic he could

not take his degrees in or be called to,'' Coleridge adds, ''without a sinking of many hundred pounds.''[17] While Coleridge is implicitly separating himself from Burnett's haplessness, their situation is in many ways shared, and he is as precise in distinguishing among the professions as he is at ease combining them. One set of objections bears on the church, a related but extended set to the law (''a wicked profession,'' he calls it later in the same letter); and law and physic demand a substantial outlay of capital, whether one is ''called to'' the bar or ''takes his degrees in'' medicine.[18] Southey, Coleridge implies, is unfairly advantaged in being able to consider these courses of action. Coleridge might have added what he also knew, which is that Southey had had the option of a Church living available to him, held by his uncle, Herbert Hill, while he and Burnett lacked Southey's helpful connections.

A critique of established networks is equally implicit in Wordsworth's earlier declaration, generically representative of his radicalism, that ''[h]ereditary distinctions and privileged orders of every species ... must necessarily counteract the progress of human improvement.''[19] Wordsworth's sense of ''human improvement'' owes as much to Smith as to Godwin, since the existence of ''privileged orders'' is not only an impediment to efficient land use and the enforcement of law but to the proper distribution of places and positions. Significantly, Wordsworth's temporary intention is to fight these ''institutions'' as an entrepreneurial journalist, a quasi-profession that would struggle toward legitimacy over the course of the nineteenth century.[20] Yet such an appeal to the open market, which offers itself as an answer to inherited privilege, demands some framing. As Wordsworth had earlier written to Mathews:

> You certainly are furnished with talents and acquirements which if properly made use of will enable you to get your bread unshackled by the necessity of professing a particular system of opinions. You have still the hope that we may be connected in some method of obtaining an Independence .... Nothing but the resolution is necessary. The field of Letters is very extensive, and it is astonishing if we cannot find some little corner, which with a little tillage will produce for us the necessities, nay even the comforts of life.[21]

While they tout the magic of the late-century literary marketplace, these lines reveal the problematic that would also define

Wordsworth's ongoing thinking about the relationship of poetic to professional work. The potentially shabby world of full-time journalism is transformed into an agricultural ''field'' that lies waiting for the desultory, non-competitive, and non-waged tillage of Wordsworth and Mathews, whose actions will require the classical, martial virtue of ''resolution,'' who are figured optimistically as a pair of gentleman farmers, and whose goal is not a steady salary but ''independence.'' Writing may be a trade, but it is not ''trade,'' and it isn't the shop or the factory. It is the proper sphere for educated men of ''talents and acquirements,'' and the independence it offers is multivalent. Wordsworth would be free of the establishment's ''system of opinions,'' and he also wants to be free of its system of handing out money and jobs.

The proximity of professional to authorial careers is not surprising, since in each case so much could depend on a certain kind of educational background, and the Lake writers share this proximity with a wide body of precedent poets. Thomas Akenside is announced as ''M.D.'' on the title page of *Pleasures of Imagination*; William Collins narrowly avoided becoming a clergyman; Thomas Gray spent much of his life preparing for a legal career he would never enter; Edward Young, as I will discuss, took orders, and other chapters of this book detail James Beattie's academic career and William Cowper's disastrous experience with the law. Further, while the professional or near-professional gentleman-author is one central figure for the Lake poets, just as relevant are poets such as Richard Savage and Thomas Chatterton, at either end of the century, who were excluded by circumstances from that profile yet were highly sensitive to the currents of professional authority that swirled around them. For writers of the Lake poets' generation, the stories of these marginal careers are also formative, insofar as Savage and Chatterton enact both the resistance and the imaginative accommodation that defines the Lake poets' response to professional work.

The history of the British professions unfolds within a number of overlapping chronological frameworks. While the institutional structure of the eighteenth-century professions, which includes the Universities, the Royal College of Physicians, and the Inns of Court, is medieval, the professions begin to take their modern form after 1688, when the anti-professional backlash of the civil wars and the subsequent court-centered regimes of Charles II and

James II give way to a revitalization of professional privilege.[22] Patterns of education also change after the wars, and professional preparation becomes more clearly separated from the generic education of the gentleman.[23] All of these shifts have precedents before 1642, and all provide connections between earlier and later professional forms. As Rosemary O'Day suggests, the development of a specifically professional ethic entails the dismantling of the early modern responsibilities of the aristocratic leader, but it also involves a recombination of those ''humanist'' tendencies on behalf of the professional project.[24] Romantic writers are able to draw on the oppositional heritage of various Whig and Country versions of patriotic ''virtue'' (versions that are not always mutually compatible) largely because professional self-justification makes formerly aristocratic values available in the context of authorized and sometimes regulated intellectual labor.

Over the course of the eighteenth century, the professions move toward the acknowledgment of new sources of status and of purportedly more rational measurements of effectiveness, but the process is not especially linear or evolutionary. As Roy Porter describes eighteenth-century medicine, for example, action on the part of apothecaries, lay practitioners, and (for Porter, most important) a growing population of clients makes ''medicine a more lucrative profession, and doctors . . . more prestigious,'' not because medical science becomes more technically proficient, but because a greater number of people are in a position to demand, and potentially to supply, ''health.''[25] More generally, during the early-century period that sees Queen Anne's bounty improve the status of the lower clergy by augmenting poorer church livings, the Act of 1729 combine attorneys and lawyers in the hope of regularizing their effectiveness, and, between 1720 and 1750, the founding of most of London's great teaching hospitals, demographic pressure is encouraging consolidation and specialization, increasing the chances of individual and collective mobility while contributing to the ''intellectual'' significance of intellectual work. Geoffrey Holmes, who has demonstrated that the Augustan professions ''expanded and diversified [and] became increasingly valuable as instruments of social fusion,'' also describes the ''rise in academic standards'' that the professions experience during this early period.[26] Yet as an important counter-example, a post-1688 regularization of the church ''career-structure'' is immediately

followed by increasing pluralism, elite defense of privilege, and a ''chaotic'' reward-structure.[27]

The process of rationalization would accelerate in the nineteenth century, when, as Magali Sarfatti Larson has phrased it, the ''move by merit against birth'' that defines certain kinds of professionalism is energized by industrial take-off and political reform.[28] The years of the Lake poets' early careers are marked, however, by a confluence of factors that are crucial for later developments. New possibilities for political radicalism stimulated by events in France come together with the population's ever-increasing desire for professional service and its hostility towards the establishment's attempts to control intellectual work, all of which opens up new ways of imagining and pursuing a poetic or a professional career. In the intensified circumstances of the 1790s, when it has become more desirable than ever to look beyond the borders of the established professions and when the demand for ''careers open to talents'' would emerge as an international imperative, the Lake poets set out to find ways of exploiting both their status as potential professional gentlemen and new and emerging ways of thinking about work. These circumstances go some way toward substantiating Clifford Siskin's signal observation that the actual language of modern professionalism gets ''written up'' between the landmark phases of early eighteenth-century and mid- and late-Victorian professional growth.[29] I would add, though, that changes and inconsistencies within this period and within the professions themselves are central to associated developments in literary representation. Unlike the Foucauldian ''disciplines'' they may superficially resemble, that is, the professions are a real object of knowledge that binds the Lake poets to their precursors.[30] Their history thus offers one concrete and specific way of talking about a ''long eighteenth century'' that is marked by difference as well as continuity.

II ROMANTIC PROFESSIONALISM, THEN AND NOW

To move from a disparate and long-term phenomenon such as ''the rise of the professions'' to the specifics of three connected poetic careers is to raise a biographical and historical question, but it is not only that. It is to begin to re-examine the matter of whether

or how any Romantic text or career can ''represent'' its historical moment, as James Chandler puts it, without being reduced to a misleadingly schematic diagram.[31] As Chandler's account, which poses Romantic theories of a featureless ''chronological time'' against the equal and opposite force of a unifying ''spirit of the age,'' indicates, Romantic criticism has followed Romantic literature in its preoccupation with the relationship of the general to the particular, or as it is sometimes expressed, of the total to the local. As a category of thinking that comes to justify the ascendance of certain social groups, ''profession'' is a site where ideology is constructed and it demands to be considered abstractly, in terms of normative structures. At the same time, professional activities are involved in the rawest kinds of acquisition, of money and of status, and are best explained at the level of empirically available detail. This double-sidedness brings professionalism directly into contact with recent developments in Romantic studies.[32] Since the history of the professions joins subjective development and training, ''*bildung*,'' to a particular institutional environment, ''professionalism'' offers a way in for readers who investigate one topic of continuing interest, the enabling conditions of high Romantic solitude and autonomy.[33] To discuss Romantic poetics in terms of the professions is also, necessarily, to consider poetry in light of topics that have been vital to what has been called ''sociable romanticism,'' including generally professional ones such as patronage and education and specifically literary ones like the book trade, the practices of journalism, and the relations of authors with other authors.[34]

While the importance of professionalism to criticism reflects the importance of professionalism to the poets themselves, critics have grown appropriately wary of this kind of identification.[35] Yet the coincidence is revealing, not so much for what it tells us about the Romantic origins of our own categories as for how it retrospectively illuminates the situations and insights of the authors. Theorists of isolation are skeptical of individual agency, perceiving the deep, motivated self as an invention, and not necessarily a fortunate one. Such writers locate, as one critic puts it, ''historical entombments – of Otherness, of revolution, of sublimity'' in acts of ''imagination'' that claim to join a fully realized subject to its social world.[36] On the other hand, sociable critics tend to grant agency to biographical subjects, even while advancing with an impressive

generalizing force.[37] A key feature of this sociable work is a sense of situated, individual authorship.[38] When the Lake poets confront the question of their own vocation, they are similarly managing the difference between what they feel free to do and the perceived constraints on their activities, and they develop what Regina Hewitt calls a ''sociological point of view'' regarding the relationships of subjects and structures.[39] The poets' continuous and purposeful actions are informed by the kinds of knowledge about agents and institutions, people and the social world, that it has also been the business of contemporary Romantic criticism to articulate, and their understanding is expressed not only in their explicit social theorizing, but in any number of informed rhetorical gestures.[40]

In granting the Lake poets a degree of reflexive knowledge and action that is the functional equivalent of later critical perspectives on their historical moment, even when these later perspectives seem to clash, I may appear to be offering up a theoretically belated version of the man of letters as hero. Paradoxically, though, this heroism, such as it is, is accomplished at the expense of failures and mistakes that most writing on poets and professionalism has not been positioned to acknowledge. On the contrary, as I will discuss in detail below, critics who have addressed this subject have generally been quick to agree that Romantic writing converges with the intents and purposes of England's professional middle classes, and by extension comes to form the template for categories such as ''modernity,'' ''literature,'' ''the imagination,'' and ''the self.'' In fact, I argue, at the moment of composition and afterwards, the poets are trying but failing to harness professional ideas that would remain stubbornly resistant to poetic uses. Despite the Lakers' lifelong familiarity with the professions, the individual poet could go seriously wrong with regard to them, either by misunderstanding their characteristics or by overestimating his own ability to change the way they worked. (The life stories of even the most successful authors display lapses in social tact.) As I have already suggested, the professions themselves contained tendencies or potentials which were not compatible, so that poets who succeeded in addressing one version of professional self-establishment might fail in regard to a co-existing set of terms. Or, to put this in a way that reflects the writers' experience, a given poet might fail and succeed at the same time.

While the Lake poets attempt a series of acts of identification with an imaginary figure, the professional gentleman, these acts never in themselves add up to a symbolically coherent identity, and they occasionally threaten to become what Erving Goffman calls in a different kind of context a ''spoiled identity,'' constantly defined in relation to a norm that it cannot live up to and that it sometimes rejects.[41]

Here, the role of the eighteenth-century author in forming the community of the noble living and the noble dead is essential. Obviously, it will not do to imagine the extraordinarily productive and innovative figures who make up the Lake school as deluded, defeated, or self-defeating, any more than it would make sense to dismiss the institutions of Romantic criticism just because contradictory positions may be sustained within them. In contrast to Goffman's ''discreditable persons'' or Erikson's ''morbid'' and ''contradicted'' subjects, figures whose attempts at identification are permanently thwarted or abandoned, the Lake poets always credibly insist on the virtue of their own positions, and they are able to do so in part because of the continuing relevance and prestige of their literary precedents. To be professional meant many different things, but there was some assurance to be had in the idea that a ''poet'' was inherently an integrated, extraordinary character. When the Lake poets confront the legacies of figures such as Savage, James Beattie, Chatterton, Herbert Croft, William Cowper, or John Henderson, it is part of a constant search for other kinds of models, other potentially productive acts of identification, that might stabilize their conception of themselves as a new, viable kind of intellectual worker.

This emphasis on identification and reconstruction distinguishes my approach particularly from two other ways of thinking about Romanticism and the professions, one which treats professionalism as a counter-term to poetic freedom, one which absorbs the Lake poets' project into a broader movement toward ''the rise of professional society.'' Because of the presumed separation of poets from economic activity, the historical category of the professional man of letters, vaguely defined as any male writer who makes a living at writing, once sorted poorly with the idea of the Romantic poet. Two books on ''the profession of letters,'' published decades apart, illustrate the point: A. S. Collins' *The Profession of Letters, 1780–1832* (1928) concentrates on

novelists and reviewers, not poets, and J. W. Saunders' *The Profession of English Letters* (1964) very briefly defines ''the Romantic dilemma'' as the problem of reaching unperceptive audiences with writing that is ''professional'' only insofar as it is ''honestly imaginative.''[42] Either a Romantic poet cannot really be ''professional,'' these books suggest, or their professionalism must be very narrowly construed as a special refusal of the marketplace.

However, to be professional, historically speaking, is not only to get paid or to not get paid. It is to possess certain attributes and a certain, albeit variable, standing in the culture-at-large.[43] Therefore, critics have re-emphasized that the utopian attitude Herbert Marcuse famously called ''the affirmative character of culture'' is functional, not critical, in the development and maintenance of the bourgeois state, and this line of inquiry has recently been pursued in persuasive detail.[44] Siskin argues that during and after the ''long eighteenth century,'' professional ''behavior was no longer simply the behavior of gentlemen . . . because the task at hand, in an increasingly complex culture, was no longer to embody . . . but to represent: to write up new kinds of power by writing them down.''[45] Professional work comes to stand in for the work of the middle class, which is now defined not in terms of doing, or of getting and spending, but in terms of potentially literary ''representing.'' From the topic of professionalism, Siskin's case moves to its claims about the broader significance of Romantic discourse. New forms of professional behavior may be attributed to the textual productions now called ''Romantic,'' and Romanticism may in turn be held accountable for historically specific forms of subjectivity. Ultimately, Romantic tales of self-fashioning provided the middle class with the organic account of a deep, ''revisable'' self that is ''valorizing and valorized by an 'open' society and a 'free' economy.''[46] In a related way, enriched by a series of close, ingenious readings, Thomas Pfau's study of ''Wordsworth's Profession'' argues that various kinds of ''cultural work,'' mobilized by shrewdly intuitive cultural producers, generate the contingent, imaginary relationships that finally constitute middle-class self-consciousness.[47] Both critics begin by assuming a fragmented social world, and both find in ''professionalism'' a productive discourse that succeeds by healing the psychic injuries inflicted upon the middle class by social change. Rather than presenting a Romantic textuality that escapes from or

effaces history, this kind of argument gives us a Romanticism that is socially engaged (just not at the banal level of policy making) and is also, while potentially dangerous, very powerful.

The dissolution of ''Romanticism'' into a complex but coherent ''professionalism'' comes at the price of a certain distortion, however, and it remains helpful to insist on the real historical vagaries of the term ''professional,'' which was used to mediate among individual practitioners, separate vocational practices, and larger narratives of authority or efficacy. The Lake poets respond directly to these vagaries. Because of the wide-ranging, intuitive nature of the poets' approach to their own work, their particular gift for writing conflict, the temporal structure of Romantic professionalism enacts the mechanism of identification in which ''a single covering figure'' condenses situations and desires shared by or pertaining to a number of different characters.[48] In the sociological imagination of Romantic professionalism, the separate and more familiar mechanism of ''identification'' with an admired person is also subjected to the processes of dream logic. Members of other professions as well as potentially professional writers who succeed or fail in the literary sphere are collapsed, critiqued, and reified, and ideas about work from a dozen different directions are anticipated or appropriated in a flurry of reflexive mental and rhetorical superordination.[49] At its most assertive, Romantic professionalism takes on the character of a constitutive social demand – what Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Southey are up to is the business of building a better ''ideal type,'' where ''ideal'' is intended to carry its normative as well as its Weberian meaning. Insofar as the Romantic professional is only an ideal, though, attachment to it is an attachment to something that isn't there. Prophecy always has its melancholy as well as its projective or aggressive components.

III WHAT IS THE ''LAKE SCHOOL''?

Given the categorical instability of the professions and of the poets' relationships to them, it is fitting that ''Lake school'' is itself a designation that functions contingently, organizing itself through a chain of circumstances to which the poets respond individually and initially called into existence by reviewers who wanted to categorize and contain poetic authority. It is possible to treat the term

as a heuristic device along the lines of ''Romanticism'' itself. David Chandler, a critic who has defended Southey's distinctiveness and value in relation to the other writers, allows that ''there were enough personal connections between Wordsworth, Southey, and Coleridge, and just about enough common purpose in their work, to merit the title of a 'School,' even if they never thought of themselves as such.''[50] William St. Clair identifies the Lake writers as among the most highly regarded poets of the first half of the nineteenth century, and while it is evident that his list, which is based on an examination of contemporary commentary, is in some ways incomplete, it is in its own terms revealing. Its members, Byron, Campbell, Coleridge, Moore, Rogers, Scott, Southey, and Wordsworth all knew each other and acted out various streams of rivalry and influence, but the poets who would come to be known as the Lake school are aesthetically and chronologically prior – Scott, a practicing lawyer the same age as Southey, did not write his great original poetry until 1805, and he did so under the direct influence of Coleridge as well as of Percy's *Reliques*.[51]

It has also been possible to treat the category of the Lake school as a mistake, born of the exigencies of journalism and perpetuated by writers who didn't know or care about the many personal and aesthetic differences among the poets.[52] Francis Jeffrey's 1802 review of Robert Southey's *Thalaba*, for example, is often credited with making the Lake school into a unified object of scrutiny, but it is not always clear what he thinks holds this school or ''sect'' of poets together.[53] Yet the case of Jeffrey, both his critique of the Lake school and his own biography, also helps us see how professional rivalries are generated within the ranks of the educated and how the collective identity of the Lake school is formed out of this dynamic. That is, Jeffrey illustrates and anticipates Marilyn Butler's insight that ''the search for Romanticism is not so much the quest for a certain literary product, as for a type of producer.''[54] At the onset of Jeffrey's working life, he had had the makings of a literary dilettante or, at best, a bad poet. His approach to the study and practice of law was desultory, and he idly considered other options, including medicine, while waiting for his prospects to gel. However, while Jeffrey's career began hesitantly and offered to go in a number of directions, it is in retrospect coherent, and both its hesitations and its final shape illustrate an important characteristic of professional life that would also inform the

efforts of the Lakers. He enacts the belief that a gentleman's habits of mind are transitive, so that the lawyer who can read quickly and widely enough is suited for the role of man of letters while, conversely, the University man who has a flexible outlook is fit for any of the professions.

Before the advent of the *Edinburgh*, Jeffrey's most strenuous thinking and writing was done privately, its aim and audience uncertain, and the establishment of the *Edinburgh Review* was itself a kind of accident, a result of the underemployment of various Whig intellects who were suffering through the chilliness of a party-conscious Tory regime.[55] Yet as editor of the *Edinburgh*, Jeffrey the law student became a great, and a well-paid, critic, and once the Tory hold on Scottish law was broken, he was also potent at the bar and in politics, finally leaving the journal for the sake of these activities in 1829.[56] In the move from writer-in-waiting to prominent public man, Jeffrey lived out an alternative to the very different kinds of trajectories that Wordsworth, Southey, and Coleridge would experience, but it was one that had always been possible for their careers, as well; at the moment of the *Thalaba* review, Jeffrey and the Lake poets were engaged in a rivalry based as much on similarity as on difference. The review makes this explicit. As he puts it, the Lake poets "vulgar" language is especially inexcusable coming from writers such as Southey who had "had the occasion to indite odes to his college-bell, and inscribe hymns to the Penates."[57] Because they share his prospects, Jeffrey suggests, the Lakers should also share his outlook.[58] He would himself leave *The Edinburgh Review* because he believed the position was incompatible with the high status he had attained as lord advocate, but his public reputation, as recalled for example in Carlyle's *Reminiscence*, accommodated both roles easily enough. Meanwhile, the Lake writers would elevate the poet largely in terms that made him "a member of the *best* profession," in Siskin's words, although the claim required some conceptual wrangling.[59]

Further, as Mark Schoenfield argues, Jeffrey's "attack against Wordsworth and the other Lake Poets . . . is professionally defensive" particularly because Jeffrey, like Wordsworth, had attempted the labor of "curing the illness of despair which the recent history of England and France had inflicted on early enthusiasts of the French Revolution."[60] Schoenfield's interpretation of events

indicates both a break and a return. It is a break, because the Lake poets' careers are shaped by the competition over a specific historical task that might fall to the professions, to the poets, or to the newly risen Quarterly reviews; it is a return, because authors and the professions had been called on to respond to a different historical crisis at the end of the seventeenth century and would continue to present an organized cure for conflict and despair, the prospect of individualized work and social cohesiveness, into the twentieth. Harold Perkin has influentially argued that Victorian professionals make up "a forgotten middle class . . . because they forgot themselves" in promulgating an ideology of testable merit that sought to transcend class struggle.[61] In the 1790s, we see the pre-conditions of this self-forgetting not in a mild, class-bound convergence, but in intraprofessional conflict.

IV SOUTHEY, WORDSWORTH, QUARLES: ONE EXAMPLE

It remains to indicate how such conflicts could play themselves out at the level of the text, and I conclude this chapter with a representative example. Letter XVI of Southey's *Letters from Spain and Portugal* (1797) ends with the inclusion in full of Frances Quarles' "Hierogliph VIII," a "beautiful poem on monastic life" that laments the waste of human talent in the "darkness" of ascetic seclusion.[62] Southey's re-contextualization of Quarles demonstrates not only his openness to a range of poetic sources, but also his inclination to respond to vocational difficulties by way of literary citation. Nominally a reflection on religious cloistering, Letter XVI is at least partially a disquisition on Southey's own situation, and its relevance is made transparent by the circumstances of its composition. Southey had been brought to Spain and Portugal by his Uncle Hill, who continued to offer him the Church living Southey had determined to reject and who represented the expectation that Southey, educated at his family's expense, would enter one of the professions instead of pursuing literature, radical politics, and an unsuitable marriage. In fact, although the trip was an attempt to remain in Hill's good graces, Southey had quietly married Edith Fricker just before leaving for Lisbon.[63] Additionally, while Southey would consider other professional options, his refusal of the Church, once made, never wavered. These events

were riddled with predictable psychological ambivalence, and Southey's encoding of this biographical material is not especially subtle. As Letter XVI observes:

> Our professions are usually chosen for us, and our educations regulated accordingly, at an age when it is not possible that we can decide wisely for ourselves: when that arrives, if our principles militate against the choice, what course must we pursue? It is dangerous when we set out on the voyage of life in an ill-provisioned vessel, to reject the aid of the pilot, and seize the helm ourselves.[64]

Southey at first grants his elders the status of ''pilots,'' but as the letter proceeds, his most striking examples of familial decision-making are the religious seclusion of children and the making of castratos for the opera, reflections which might have made the similarly beleaguered Wordsworth and Coleridge smile, or grunt, in sympathy.[65] The deployment of Quarles's anti-monastic verse at the climax of this letter thus performs two tasks. It condenses Southey's anxieties about familial obligation into the conflict between free British Protestantism and the despotism of the Catholic South, and it further condenses these into the struggle for evaluative control that Jeffrey's *Thalaba* review would later take up. As Francis Jeffrey would recognize, Quarles is a readily available resource for Southey, but as if in anticipation, Southey ''make[s] no apology for enriching [his] volume'' by including the other-than-prestigious Quarles.[66]

The appearance of ''Hierogliph VIII'' in the *Letters* gains further interest from the fact that Wordsworth would find a more enduring use for the vocational language that had first caught Southey's attention.[67] Critics have long speculated about the source for the ringing opening of the 1799 version of *The Prelude*, and especially for its very first phrase:

> Was it for this
> That one, the fairest of all rivers, loved
> To blend his murmurs with my nurse's song,
> And from his alder shades and Rocky falls,
> And from his fords and shallows, sent a voice
> That flowed along my dreams?

As Robert J. Griffin has recently discussed, the phrase in question appears in *The Rape of the Lock* (''Was it for this you took such constant care[?]'') and has been traced back to similar language in

Book IV of the *Aeneid*, which Pope may be parodying (''Was all that pomp of woe for this prepared[?]'').[68] There is no reason not to accept that the phrase accumulates resonances as it passes from context to context. Nonetheless, finding the source of this language in Pope is of a piece with finding it in Milton or Virgil. All of these gestures reproduce the investment in canonicity defended by Jeffrey. In fact, Wordsworth is most immediately following Southey's example (and perhaps his text) and quoting the beginning of ''Hierogliph VIII'':

> Was it for this, the breath of Heav'n was blowne
> Into the nostrils of this Heaven'ly Creature?
> Was it for this, that sacred Three in One
> Conspir'd to make this Quintessence of Nature?
> Did heav'nly Providence intend
> So rare a fabric for so poor an end?

Not only its suggestive and repeated opening, but this entire stanza, is relevant to Wordsworth's lines. Quarles's poem laments the squandering of human talent or ''light'' that results from monastic practice. Wordsworth is struggling with a moment at which his own poetic talent, granted to him by ''voice'' of the river, appears likewise to be going to waste. The inspiration of heaven has been replaced by the blended sounds of the Derwent River, and the forestalled task is now the still-hard-to-define ministry of the poet, but the passages, each centered on vocation, are parallel, and Quarles's urging that ''a thousand Tapours may gaine light from thee'' is a plea to which Wordsworth's lines may be said to respond. Jeffrey has underappreciated, but he has understood, Wordsworth's special sensitivity to a kind of epigrammatic writing that balances the sublimely scriptural with the more humbly instructive. It is a measure of the difference between Wordsworth and Southey that Wordsworth is able to transform these lines so completely even while remaining so close to them, largely by re-casting them in the first person. On the other hand, Southey's shrewd and interpretively active inclusion of them in their original form indicates his particular gifts as an anthologizer, a compiler, and a bricoleur.

Chapter 1, ''Cursing Doctor Young, and after,'' continues this introductory section and examines some of the definitions of the term ''profession'' that are operative for the Lake poets. In

particular, it argues, new forms of professionalism are partially based on the proper management of risk, a subject that, in its literary version, habitually calls up the question of the afterlife. The chapter's first example is Coleridge's response to John Henderson, a celebrated Bristol intellectual who died in 1788 and who in his lifetime resisted accepting a traditional, non-innovative professional identity. Especially because of Henderson's interest in the occult, the conversation surrounding his death generates competing ideas about how the afterlife might be depicted in conjunction with competing, risky and risk-averse, versions of professional identity, and Coleridge takes the opportunity to embrace a progressive ethic of sublime vocational danger. The chapter's second example addresses one of Wordsworth's principle accounts of risk, death and the professions. ''Tintern Abbey'' has long been understood as a text that ''secularizes'' the providential vision of eighteenth-century poets. As I argue, however, what is at stake in the poem is also the professionalism of the poet, which may be more vital than the waning public influence of the cleric. Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* depicts a priest who aspires to lay speech; the Wordsworth of ''Tintern Abbey,'' an unconnected layman, aspires to present a rigorous and rational account of human ''training'' that founders, in the turn to Dorothy, on the gendered terrain of late-eighteenth-century education. Young thus appears in ''Tintern Abbey,'' and again in *The Prelude*, as a poet whose career risk is creditable in its own terms but requires modification in light of new professional practices.

The second section of the book broadens out to address the eighteenth-century context from which Romantic professionalism emerges. Chapter 2, ''Merit and reward in 1729,'' takes a long view of the author's professional situation and investigates changing conceptions of merit and virtue, patronage and independence, and origins and experience. It begins with the life and writings of the famous Grub Street poet, Richard Savage. Criticism has tended to read Savage's career as belatedly embracing an aristocratic patronage system that would be rendered moot by the burgeoning marketplace. On the contrary, I argue that Savage is visionary insofar as he borrows classical, aristocratic language in order to insist on an autonomous, professional identity for poets, a topic also taken up, or lived out, by David Hume, Samuel Johnson, and James Beattie. Describing autonomy in terms of magical