

Antiquarian landscape and allusion in Wordsworth's *Excursion*

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This paper will explore Wordsworth's use of antiquarian imagery in his first published epic, *The Excursion* (1814).¹⁾ In nine books, the poem's narrator describes a walking tour of the English Lake District with three companions, and recounts their philosophical and moral discussions. Each of the three companions in the excursion party—the Solitary, the Wanderer, and the Pastor—makes references to British antiquarianism; yet each character conveys a complex response to antiquarianism. Their passing statements on antiquarianism (as a field of intellectual enquiry), and antiquaries (as the practitioners of that field) position them on a number of dialectics—for example between optimistic and pessimistic views of ancient Britons, and between rigorous and fanciful interpretations of antiquarian materials.

Sometimes the characters make overt statements on the role of antiquity and monument in human life; on other occasions, antiquarian images and expressions in their speech hints at their historiographic and philosophical positions. In his depictions of all three characters, Wordsworth's antiquarian language also alludes to antiquarian language

1) 'Antiquarianism' in the Romantic period refers to an amorphous intellectual field that encompassed early elements of anthropology, ancient history, archaeology, classical studies, folklore and mythology, history, and related disciplines. 'Popular antiquarianism' in Britain refers to the study of British folklore, history, languages, and material culture. For further details see Marilyn Butler, 'Antiquarianism (Popular)' in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture 1776–1832*, ed. Iain McCalman (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1999), 328–38.

and imagery in other literary texts. The three sections of this paper explore the different uses of antiquarian language and literary allusion by the three main named characters in the poem (Solitary, Wanderer, and Pastor), and how Wordsworth uses these characters to explore conflicts and continuities in his own mind regarding his antiquarian materials from 1806 and 1814.

The main benefit of reading *The Excursion* through the intellectual context of antiquarianism lies in elucidating part of what Sally Bushell sees as the poem's 'performative' philosophy. Early readers of the poem assumed that it was a didactic philosophical work, despite Wordsworth writing in his 'Preface' that 'It is not the Author's intention formally to announce a system...' (*Exc* 39, l.51). Similarly, Wordsworth had written in 1798, 'I know no book or system of moral philosophy written with sufficient power to melt into our affections...' (Owen and Smyser 1: 103). In contrast, Bushell argues convincingly that

Wordsworthian philosophy is about local links and connections between people and place, past and present, men and women, and the strength that can be drawn from this for both character and reader. (Bushell 91)

The first two items in this list—connections between people and place, and past and present—drew on the intellectual traditions of classical and popular antiquarianism for Wordsworth and his circle, in terms of their ideas, their language, and their expression in other contemporary poetry. The Wanderer praises the Pastor's epitaphic tales as

"...words of heartfelt truth,
Tending to patience when Affliction strikes;
To hope and love; to confident repose
In God; and reverence for the dust of Man." (*Exc* vii. 1053–7)

Therefore, the question which this essay primarily seeks to answer is: what

language and ideas of antiquarianism (both in antiquarian and literary texts) were available to Wordsworth to express 'reverence for the dust of Man', and how did Wordsworth use this language to express his own ideas?

The essay contends that in the second decade of the nineteenth century, Wordsworth's use of antiquarian allusion in his poetry demonstrates the poet maintaining a balance between fundamentally contrasting positions on the aesthetic and philosophical worth of the materials and methodologies of the field of antiquarianism to his poetry and experience. The three named characters in *The Excursion* all make references to antiquarianism, in poetry that alludes to literary antiquarian sources. Yet in contrast to accusations by contemporary critics such as Hazlitt, these three characters do not speak with one voice; on the subject of antiquarianism, their dialogues and tales do not work towards a synthetic position representing Wordsworth's ideas in 1814.

Rather—as critics such as Bushell have pointed out in connection to the poem's philosophical discourse—the three characters maintain distinct and contrasting positions. This essay contends that each of these positions is 'true' to Wordsworth with reference to earlier and later thought: the Solitary represents Wordsworth's earliest engagement with 'fanciful' antiquarian materials; the Wanderer represents Wordsworth's long-sustained imaginative engagement with an 'unscientific' but productive popular antiquarianism; and the Pastor represents Wordsworth's growing conservative response to folklore and antiquities, that will ironically lead him back to his earliest pessimistic stance on ancient British history, as represented in the first draft of *Salisbury Plain*.

The essay offers a number of specific contentions related to Romantic-period antiquarianism and poetry that hope to shape better understanding of *The Excursion*. Firstly, the 'despondency' of the Solitary in the poem relates to his present condition, and not to his earlier pursuits in antiquarianism and natural philosophy; Wordsworth carefully distinguishes the young Solitary from the eighteenth-century antiquary, and praises his methods of philosophical investigation. Secondly, the

Wanderer, as a late-eighteenth-century representation of an idealised British bard, exists in the poem as a second-order character, a creation of the poem's (and hence Wordsworth's) antiquarian optimism. The Wanderer could not exist in the empirical or disillusioned contexts of the Solitary and Pastor's nineteenth-century antiquarianism, yet he does. Finally, the Pastor represents Wordsworth's growing affinity for the conservative, teleological antiquarianism of the Church of England in the nineteenth century; the Pastor's negation in Book 9 of the antiquarian context of the Wanderer's 'correction' of the Solitary in Book 4 unsettles the question of historiography and antiquarian methodology in the poem, and leaves it unresolved.

The Solitary: Wordsworth's Antiquary

The first specific references to antiquarianism in *The Excursion* relate to the Solitary. His hermetic life resembles that of the stereotypical British antiquary's; he himself confesses—in his despondency—that he thinks like an antiquarian:

I entertain
The antiquarian humour, and am pleased
To skim along the surfaces of things... (*Excursion* iii. 133–5)²

Immediately, therefore, Wordsworth associates antiquarianism with superficiality; he implies that the Solitary cannot 'see into the life of things', as the young Wordsworth describes himself doing in 'Tintern Abbey' (1798). The Wanderer and the Pastor, in contrast, generally spurn encounters with antiquarian objects, and disparage antiquarianism's methods, though they draw on antiquarian knowledge (local monuments and epitaphs, history, folk traditions, and language) to furnish examples

2) All quotations from *The Excursion* are taken from William Wordsworth, *The Excursion*, eds. Sally Bushell, James A. Butler, and Michael C. Jaye (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2007). Hereafter *Exc.*

for their arguments.

Wordsworth describes in detail the Solitary's dwelling in Book 2, in a passage that makes evident the extent of the Solitary's education, and the diversity or eclecticism of his interests:

What a wreck
 We had about us! scattered was the floor,
 And, in like sort, chair, window-seat, and shelf,
 With books, maps, fossils, withered plants and flowers,
 And tufts of mountain moss; and here and there
 Lay, intermixed with these, mechanic tools,
 And scraps of paper,—some I could perceive
 Scribbled with verse: a broken angling-rod
 And shattered telescope, together linked
 By cobwebs, stood within a dusty nook;
 And instruments of music, some half-made,
 Some in disgrace, hung dangling from the walls. (*Exc* ii. 686–97)

These lines catalogue the Solitary's former pursuits, including interests in discovery, exploration, and navigation; the natural philosophy of the earth and its flora; poetry (including perhaps antiquarian ballads); astronomy; and music. The 'broken angling-rod', which seems an incongruous addition to the portrait of a former antiquarian and natural philosopher, may represent a playful reference to Humphry Davy. Davy, a polymath as well as a brilliant natural philosopher, had written a book on angling, and enjoyed fishing with Wordsworth.³⁾ Like *The Excursion*, Humphry's *Salmonia* records an excursion by four men (*Halieus*, *Poietes*, *Physicus*, and

3) See Humphry Davy, *Salmonia* (London: John Murray, 1828); Penelope Hughes-Hallett, *The Immortal Dinner* (London: Penguin, 2001). Hughes-Hallett writes: 'In his Preface to the 1802 edition of *Lyrical Ballads*, Wordsworth wrote of the relationship between science and poetry in a manner which suggests the possibility of some influence from Davy's ideas... He and Wordsworth shared a pleasure in fishing, and much time was dedicated to this pursuit... Later in life he wrote a treatise on fish and fishing, *Salmonia*' (Hughes-Hallett 151–2).

Ornither), and their discussions on philosophy and natural history in connection with fly-fishing. (Their fishing trip also takes nine days, one for each book of *The Excursion*.) The image of the angling-rod may also allude to Izaak Walton's *Compleat Angler*, a favourite miscellany of Wordsworth's, and one of his sources for *The White Doe of Rylstone* (published 1815).

Wordsworth depicts the Solitary's pleasurable and intellectually profitable pursuits as transient and subject to decay. Their diversity cannot sustain the Solitary's broken spirit because the knowledge they give cannot lead him to any consoling eternal truths, as he himself later laments (*Exc* iii. 443–68). Wordsworth here implies a common criticism levelled at the field of antiquarianism for centuries: its obsession with minutiae and the diversity of knowledge, and its consequent failure to remain relevant or beneficial to society.⁴⁾ Wordsworth repeats this somewhat satirical portrait of the myopic perspective of some antiquaries and natural philosophers later in the poem, in the Solitary's description of the botanist and the geologist, and in the Pastor's description of a mad lover.⁵⁾ The Pastor describes the lover, who, like a mad alchemist,

was crazed in brain

By unrequited love; and scaled the rocks,
Dived into caves, and pierced the matted woods,
In hope to find some virtuous herb, of power
To cure his malady!

(*Exc* vi. 108–12)

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- 4) For example, see Edward King, *A Speech Delivered by Edward King, Esq., President of the Society of Antiquaries of London, at Somerset Place, on the 23rd of April, 1784...* (London: J. Nichols, 1784). King writes, 'Some men, of much learning and discernment, have been estranged from the study of antiquities, by observing... the dull unanimated pursuits of certain Antiquarians, who are continually searching amongst rubbish.... And other men (perhaps of sounder judgment) are equally estranged, [because] they idolize the works of remote antiquity; and do mankind the honour to suppose, that there are no beings, *now living*, hardly worthy to crawl upon the face of the earth.'
- 5) For the Solitary's 'wandering herbalist' and amateur geologist, see *Exc* iii. 159–93.

His friends, cautioning him against a damaging immersion in natural philosophy, inadvertently drive him to more mystical botanizing (vi. 167–75).⁶

In Book 3, during the excursion party's visit to the Natural Chapel, the Solitary gives his opinion of the legacy of great antiquarian objects in the landscape. His speech couples the language of antiquarian investigation to the despair that pervaded the typical early-nineteenth-century response to ruins. The Solitary begins by alluding to a coda on human pride by one of Shakespeare's great equivocators and rationalizers.⁷ He then continues:

The shapes before our eyes,
And their arrangement, doubtless must be deemed
The sport of Nature, aided by blind Chance
Rudely to mock the works of toiling Man.
And hence, this upright Shaft of unhewn stone,
From Fancy, willing to set off her stores
By sounding Titles, hath acquired the name
Of Pompey's Pillar; that I gravely style
My Theban Obelisk; and, there, behold
A Druid Cromlech!—thus I entertain
The antiquarian humour, and am pleased

6) The Fenwick note to this passage indicates that Wordsworth based the mad lover on a schoolmate at Hawkshead. In another connection to antiquarian sentiment in the poem (the preference for the ancient over the modern), the same note then digresses into a fervent wish that ruin strike a particular piece of new architecture on Grasmere Lake—a boathouse erected by another Hawkshead schoolmate. See *The Fenwick Notes of William Wordsworth*, ed. Jared Curtis (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1993), 84–5.

7) The Solitary says: 'I *should have grieved* | *Hereafter*, should perhaps have blamed myself, | If from my poor Retirement ye had gone | Leaving this Nook unvisited...'*'* (*Exc* iii. 120–3, my emphasis). Macbeth, like the Solitary, has also recently lost a wife: 'She should have died hereafter. | There would have been a time for such a word. | Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow | Creeps in this petty pace from day to day | To the last syllable of recorded time...'*'* (*Macbeth* 5.5.17–21).

To skim along the surfaces of things,
 Beguiling harmlessly the listless hours. (Exc iii. 128–40)

The Solitary's present despondency disrupts any deep connection between human life and the natural landscape, thus acting as a deliberate foil to Wordsworth's argument that the external world is fitted to the mind. Nature, to the Solitary, has only created the Natural Chapel ('aided by blind Chance') to mock the works of mankind.⁸⁾ The Solitary's ideas in these lines represent the oubliette at the end of the path of the *philosophes*, thinkers once celebrated by the young Wordsworth and Coleridge, but ultimately abandoned for their narrow-minded rationalism and growing atheism.⁹⁾

The Solitary belittles the stone columns of the Natural Chapel by comparing them to the grander and more lasting works of man. He confesses that even as these natural objects 'mock the works of toiling Man', they inspire as much false pride in human achievement as did their ancient counterparts. The Solitary makes this argument with another round of antiquarian associations. In the mind of the observer, the stone columns

feed

Pity and scorn, and melancholy pride,
 Not less than that huge Pile (from some abyss

8) When they first arrive at the Natural Chapel, the Solitary gives a much more optimistic description of its significance; see Exc iii. 80–95.

9) See Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries* (Oxford and New York, 1981), 80–82. For example, Butler writes that 'Once radicalism denoted atheism he [Coleridge] could no longer be a radical' (Butler, *Romantics* 80). Coleridge's rejection of these trends spurred him to tell Wordsworth (ca. 10 September 1799): 'I wish you would write a poem, in blank verse [not *The Recluse*, but perhaps made part of it], addressed to those, who, in consequence of the complete failure of the French Revolution, have thrown up all hopes of the amelioration of mankind, and are sinking into an almost epicurean selfishness, disguising the same under the soft titles of domestic attachment and contempt for visionary *philosophes*' (Griggs 1: 527).

Of mortal power unquestionably sprung)
 Whose hoary Diadem of pendant rocks
 Confines the shrill-voiced whirlwind, round and round
 Eddying within its vast circumference,
 On Sarum's naked plain;— than Pyramid
 Of Egypt, unsubverted, undissolved;
 Or Syria's marble Ruins towering high
 Above the sandy Desert, in the light
 Of sun or moon. (Exc iii. 145–56)

Here 'melancholy pride' echoes the same phrase in Southey's recent publication, *The Curse of Kehama* (1810).¹⁰

Wordsworth represents this attitude of the Solitary as 'The antiquarian humour', a form of casual intellectual enquiry concerned only with outward appearances of natural and human-made forms, and 'the surfaces of things'. On the one hand, this seems a clear dismissal of British antiquarianism in 1814. On the other hand, Wordsworth takes care to differentiate the Solitary from the stereotypical English antiquary. The Solitary praises the botanist or apothecary ('The wandering Herbalist') and the geologist ('He, who with pocket hammer smites the edge | Of every luckless rock or stone...') as intellects whose interactions with nature, if myopic and obsessive, do no harm: 'The mind is full—no pain is in their sport' (Exc iii. 166, 182–3, 198). Yet he points out that he himself no longer has an interest in the empirical study of past or future, time or space (the domains of the antiquarian and the natural philosopher) on the grounds that such endeavours will provide no answers to the fundamental questions of human existence and death. In 'Despondency' (as Wordsworth titles Book 3), the Solitary asks:

10) 'With a calm smile of melancholy pride | She met him now, and, turning half aside, | Her warning hand repell'd the dear embrace' (Southey xx. 13–15, p.214). According to Dorothy, Wordsworth had read Southey's poem by 30 December 1810, and had admired it: 'it has great merit' (letter from Dorothy Wordsworth to Catherine Clarkson) (De Selincourt and Moorman 1: 458).

...what avails Imagination high
 Or Questions deep? what profits all that Earth,
 Or Heaven's blue Vault, is suffered to put forth
 Of impulse or allurements, for the Soul
 To quit the beaten track of life, and soar
 Far as she finds a yielding element
 In past or future; far as she can go
 Through time or space; if neither in the one
 Nor in the other region, nor in aught
 That Fancy, dreaming o'er the map of things,
 Hath placed beyond these penetrable bounds,
 Words of assurance can be heard... [?]' (Exc iii. 214–25)

The reader might think at this point that the Solitary's lack of interest in intellectual and creative enquiry stems from his despondency, but the Solitary goes on to point out that in his youth, although he explored 'the destiny of human kind', it was not 'as an intellectual game' as it must have been for some of his colleagues (Exc iii. 290, 291).

The Solitary distances the self-portrait of his youthful studies from two negative qualities of other intellectuals: obsession with or monomania towards a particular 'object' (perhaps a historical artefact, scientific process, or particular field); and an obsession with death or the afterlife ('those dark, impervious shades, that hang | Upon the region whither we are bound') (Exc iii. 288–312). As I have argued elsewhere, literature older than the Faust story associates these two negative qualities with the stereotypes of the obsessive alchemist and philosopher—and from the seventeenth century, the antiquarian. For all the text's assertions of the character's despondency, the Solitary concludes his speech with a paean to the 'winds of Autumn' that transforms the defiant and ironic language of two of Shakespeare's greatest tragic heroes—Lear and Hamlet—into assertions of the beauty of mutability over the pleasures of 'Arcady' and

'the Golden Age'.¹¹⁾

The Solitary's 'antiquarian fancy', then, does not seem to represent the disordered ramblings of a form of overly rationalist intellectual enquiry that, as the shape of the larger poem implies, cannot provide solace for the human soul in times of suffering. Susan Wolfson describes the Solitary as 'something of a failed questioner'—one who has 'Yielded up moral questions in despair,' as Wordsworth claims he himself did once (Wolfson 119; W. Wordsworth, *Prel-13* x. 900). However, I read him as Wordsworth's *apologia* for this earlier self, the fanciful youth of *Prelude* Books 3, 5 and 7, reader of the *Arabian Nights* and Spenser, avid watcher of *Jack the Giant-Slayer* at Sadler's Wells. The Solitary maintains his 'antiquarian fancy' but he is not, nor was not, the mad antiquarian; he exercised the 'correct' or 'healthy' form of Baconian scientific enquiry ('by love of truth | Urged on, or haply by intense delight | In feeding thought, wherever thought could feed') while still delighting in the materials of fancy and antiquity. He may be a 'failed questioner' in that he has stopped asking questions (and will ostensibly be 'cured' of this malady in Books 5–7) but he was, more importantly, asking the right kinds of questions as a youth. The other characters in the poem critique his current moral state, but not his methodology. He is, from this perspective, a transcendent antiquarian.

The Solitary introduces the stone columns of the Natural Chapel, with their antiquarian associations, as 'freaks of Nature | And her blind helper Chance' (*Exc* iii. 143–4). Wordsworth uses the phrase 'freaks of Nature' only twice in his poetry: once here, and once to describe Bartholomew Fair in London, in Book 7 of *The Prelude*.¹²⁾ This repetition of a key phrase from *The Prelude* suggests that Wordsworth initially invests these two sets of phenomena, both of interest to the antiquary or the collector, with a similar power to fascinate. The antiquary or collector's cabinet holds matter

11) The Solitary's apostrophe to nature at iii. 313–30 combines allusions to two famous speeches from Shakespeare's tragedies: Hamlet's 'What a piece of work is man...' and Lear's 'Blow winds and crack your cheeks!' (*Hamlet* 2.2.305–11; *King Lear* 3.2.1–9).

12) 'All freaks of Nature, all Promethean thoughts...' (*Prel-13* vii. 689).

animal, vegetable and mineral, as well as unusual artificial objects. Behind its decontextualizing but objectifying glass, all things become 'freaks of Nature'. Writing from the Solitary's perspective, Wordsworth continues the self-interrogation of *Prelude* Book 7: he questions the fascinations of his younger self; he uses the poetry to differentiate classes of antiquarian objects and curiosities based on their usefulness to the mature imagination. In effect, he attempts to create a more definite scheme of connections between his everyday affections and his poetic purposes.

This process of observation, reflection (in the case of *The Prelude*) and composition reflects not only Wordsworth's critical writing in the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* on the qualities of permanent poetry, but his more recent writing in the 'Essay on Epitaphs'. The first Essay (printed as an appendix to *The Excursion*) discusses the role of objectivity in epitaph; Wordsworth argues for obscurity in epitaph in service of 'truth... of the highest order' (*Exc* 310). The epitaph writer, in implicit contrast to the antiquary, should not be an 'Anatomist' of their historical subject (the deceased). Yet, the Essay simultaneously notes that a good epitaph is not hermetic or occult verse, but universal. It appeals to those same everyday affections which Wordsworth remembers, and questions, in his own poetic self-analysis:

...an Epitaph is not a proud Writing shut up for the studious; it is exposed to all, to the wise and the most ignorant; it is condescending, perspicuous, and lovingly solicits regard; its story and admonitions are brief, that the thoughtless, the busy and indolent, may not be deterred, nor the impatient tired; the stooping Old Man cons the engraven record like a second horn-book;—the Child is proud that he can read it—and the Stranger is introduced by its meditation to the company of a Friend: it is concerning all, and for all:—in the Church-yard it is open to the day; the sun looks down upon the stone, and the rains of Heaven beat against it. (*Exc* 311)

Through the *persona* of the Solitary, therefore, Wordsworth accomplishes again what he so deftly accomplishes in Book 7 of *The Prelude* (and

throughout that poem, especially in Books 3, 5, 9 and 10); he represents youthful tastes and beliefs as immature, even regrettable, while at the same time presenting these tastes and beliefs in vivid poetry, and affectionate tones. Wordsworth commemorates as he negates; this strategy gives an epitaphic quality—by his own definition in the *Essay*—to much of his autobiographical verse. The trinity of the Solitary, the Wanderer, and the Pastor allow Wordsworth to critique his own tastes and beliefs while confirming their enduring appeal to him. In the case of the Solitary, his intellectual eclecticism, and his tendency to ‘skim along the surfaces of things’ and anthropomorphise (or more accurately, lithopomorphise) nature into history represents the idle play of any pedestrian tourist, no doubt including Wordsworth and the companions of his walks.

In conclusion, this section has argued that although the Solitary has become despondent through the lack of spiritual fulfilment in his chosen philosophy (the optimism of Voltaire), he represents an early mode of Wordsworth’s intellectual enquiry that the poet cannot unequivocally reject. The old Solitary’s ‘antiquarian humour’ reflects what Wordsworth sees as positive elements of historical and scientific enquiry: an inquisitive mind; love of nature; a broad perspective (not obsessive or monomaniacal); an active fancy (seeing the objects of nature as analogous to man-made antiquities); and a sense of humour (not taking this fancy, or any other philosophical position, too seriously).

The old Solitary represents a serious philosopher with antiquarian interests—a man who has fallen into despondency not because of his methods, but because of trauma and emotional distress, and the inappropriateness of these methods to compensate for such distress. The Solitary’s intellectual views are not incorrect, merely incomplete. The ‘correction’ of the Solitary’s despondency forms the main narrative structure of the first half of the poem; as contemporary and modern critics have correctly identified, this narrative suits a poem about the importance of human feeling and sympathy over abstract philosophy. However, the present study attempts to warn critics away from the tendency to reject the Solitary’s position wholesale. As William Hazlitt correctly identified, ‘The

recluse, the pastor, and the pedlar, are three persons in one poet' (Hazlitt 542). Hazlitt disapproved of this characterisation on dramatic grounds, but did not consider that the poet might be presenting a set of balanced philosophical positions, rather than a set of straw men through which Wordsworth could propagate one particular argument.

The Wanderer: Ancient Britons and Pagan Tradition in *The Excursion*

In the context of the Solitary's antiquarian interests, the Wanderer and his argument in Books 3 and 4 represent a quite different frame of reference. The Wanderer is an object of folklore (that is, a trope of popular antiquarianism) in contrast to the Solitary as a subject of antiquarianism—that is, an eclectic philosopher capable of 'antiquarian humour'.

If the Solitary represents the potential and pitfalls of antiquarian study in the early nineteenth century, then the Wanderer represents the potential and pitfalls of popular antiquarian tradition. The Wanderer is not himself an antiquary (although he demonstrates a strong knowledge of popular antiquarianism), but an artefact of idealistic antiquarian texts—a trope of British folklore and myth. Some critics of *The Excursion* latched onto the obvious problem of social realism in an epic poem in which the main character is an itinerant pedlar in the north of England. Francis Jeffrey's savage evaluation in *The Edinburgh Review* typifies this perspective: '[Wordsworth] persists in choosing his examples of intellectual dignity and tenderness exclusively from the lower ranks of society' (Jeffrey 5). Jeffrey criticises many of the poem's characters on this basis, both its principle characters and the characters who inhabit the poem's tales-within-a-tale. But he reserves his greatest wrath for the character of the Wanderer (the 'Pedlar'):

What but the most wretched and provoking perversity of taste and judgment, could induce any one to place his chosen advocate of wisdom and virtue in so absurd and fantastic a condition?

(Jeffrey 30)

On the grounds of rigorous popular antiquarianism and literary history, Wordsworth would have known that his creation of the Wanderer represented—like the Solitary's visions of his 'Pompey's Pillar', 'Theban Obelisk', and 'Druid Cromlech'—his own 'antiquarian humour'. The difference, of course, is that Wordsworth finds his idealised antiquarian creation aesthetically and spiritually sustaining, while the Solitary no longer draws solace from his own antiquarian fancies.

What did Wordsworth know about competing interpretations of the historical basis for his character of the Wanderer? After the more self-contained tale of Margaret in Book 1 of the poem (based on *The Ruined Cottage*, one of Wordsworth's earliest mature blank verse poems, unpublished since 1798), Wordsworth sets the tone of the rest of *The Excursion* through an image frequently used in British popular antiquarianism: the wandering bard. In lines originally composed in 1804—further evidence of some continuity in Wordsworth's interest in antiquarian subject matter—he writes:

In days of yore how fortunately fared
 The Minstrel! wandering on from Hall to Hall,
 Baronial Court or Royal; cheered with gifts
 Munificent, and love, and Ladies' praise;
 Now meeting on his road an armed Knight,
 Now resting with a Pilgrim by the side
 Of a clear brook;—beneath an Abbey's roof
 One evening sumptuously lodged; the next
 Humbly, in a religious Hospital;
 Or with some merry Outlaws of the wood;
 Or haply shrouded in a Hermit's cell.
 Him, sleeping or awake, the Robber spared;
 He walked—protected from the sword of war
 By virtue of that sacred Instrument
 His Harp, suspended at the Traveller's side;
 His dear Companion wheresoe'er he went

Opening from Land to Land an easy way
 By melody, and by the charm of verse. (Exc ii. 1–18)

The last lines of this passage owe their language to Wordsworth's early reading on bards and minstrels. In particular, they resemble James Beattie's description in *The Minstrel* (1779). Beattie declines to describe, in his third stanza, 'How forth The Minstrel fared in days of yore,' a line almost identical to Wordsworth's opening line above (Beattie i. 21). Beattie goes on to describe the minstrel; how

from his bending shoulder, decent hung
 His harp, the sole companion of his way,
 Which to the whistling wind responsive rung:
 And ever as he went some merry lay he sung. (Beattie i. 24–7)

Wordsworth's phrase 'the charm of verse' may also echo George Crabbe's sonnet 'The Wish' (1778).¹³⁾

This optimistic portrait of minstrels counters the dissertation on minstrelsy that prefaces Joseph Ritson's *Ancient English Metrical Romances* (1802), which Wordsworth may have read.¹⁴⁾ Ritson presents an unromantic, historically incisive interpretation of English bards. He declares that the English 'acquire'd the art of romance-writieing from the French', and that English minstrels

were too ignorant, and too vulgar, to translate pieceës of several
 thousand lines; though such pieceës may have been translateëd or

13) Crabbe's sonnet, written in 1778 but not published, concludes with the poet's wish to 'teach mankind | Our greatest pleasures are the most refined; | The cheerful tale with fancy to rehearse, | And gild the moral with *the charm of verse*.' In 'Fragments of Verse from Mr. Crabbe's Early Note-Books', in George Crabbe, *Poetical Works* (8 vols., London, 1834), ii. 311, ll.11-14 (my emphasis).

14) See Joseph Ritson, *Ancient English Metrical Romanceës* (3 vols., London: G. and W. Nicol, 1802).

written for them... (Ritson, *Romances* 1: c, cvi)

Ritson concludes that

the word *minstrel*, whatever it might have originally, or anciently signify'd, meant no more, in comparatively modern times, than a *fidler*, a *crowder*, a *musician*, is evident from all the glossarys and dictionarys which mention them... (Ritson, *Romances* 1: ccxii)

However, he pays them 'no small compliment' to agree that 'as they were, doubtless, much more active and useful; they were infinitely better pay'd, than the idle and good-for-nothing clergy' (Ritson, *Romances* 1: ccxvii).

In contrast, the optimistic antiquarian imagery of Wordsworth's description of minstrels in *The Excursion* recurs in his poetry, particularly his later poetry. The reference to 'some merry Outlaws of the wood', of course, suggests the English myth of Robin Hood, a trope of popular eighteenth-century antiquarian lore that appears in *The Prelude*.¹⁵⁾ Wordsworth excises a similar—though more clumsy—allusion from *The Tuft of Primroses* in 1808.¹⁶⁾ Ritson's *Robin Hood* (1795), an exhaustive work of literary antiquarianism, probably contains all that Wordsworth could have known of the myth.¹⁷⁾ Ritson makes no claims to historical truth, only antiquarian completeness (Ritson, *Robin Hood* 1: ii). His book quotes in full

15) See William Wordsworth, *The Thirteen-Book Prelude*, ed. Mark L. Reed (2 vols., Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1991), v. 364–9. Hereafter *Prel*–13.

16) See William Wordsworth, *The Tuft of Primroses, with other Late Poems for The Recluse*, ed. Joseph F. Kishel, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1986), 54 (W. Wordsworth, *Tuft*). Kenneth Johnston describes how, in this poem, 'Wordsworth subsequently wrote in, and then wisely crossed out, a wildly inappropriate swerve toward a more sunshiny band of recluses, Robin Hood and his Merry Men.' See Kenneth R. Johnston, 'Wordsworth's Last Beginning: The Recluse in 1808,' *ELH* 43.3 (Autumn 1976): 316–41, 332.

17) See Joseph Ritson, *Robin Hood: a Collection of All the Ancient Poems, Songs, and Ballads, Now Extant, Relative to that Celebrated English Outlaw* (2 vols., London, 1795).

the ballad 'Robin Hood and Gy of Gisborne', which Wordsworth would have known from Percy's *Reliques*.¹⁸⁾ Although Wordsworth did not receive Ritson's *Robin Hood* from Mrs. Skepper (Basil Montagu's housekeeper and later wife) in 1808, as he did three of Ritson's other works, he may have known it, or at least the tales it contained.¹⁹⁾

The Narrator of *The Excursion* uses the passage on minstrels above to draw a comparison between ancient British bards and the Wanderer, as Wordsworth did in his unpublished 'Pedlar' material.²⁰⁾ The Wanderer rambles 'through the tamer ground | Of these our unimaginative days' (*Exc* ii. 25–6). These lines rephrase the sentiment expressed in the same stanza from Beattie quoted above: 'This sapient age disclaims all classic lore...' (Beattie i. 19). From the perspective of the Solitary—who has not yet appeared when the Narrator speaks these lines—this statement might represent Wordsworth's acceptance that the character of the Wanderer belongs to the realm of antiquarian fancy. Yet the Wanderer or Pedlar remains one of the most vividly realised, if idealised, characters in Wordsworth's poetry. As Wordsworth laments 'our unimaginative days', he affirms that the Pedlar is both happier and wiser (though he never states explicitly, more 'real') than the British minstrels of antiquarian lore. In implicit parallel with the Solitary's position in Book 3, the Narrator thus disclaims the 'Golden Age' and the 'Arcady' of classical or British bards for the 'tamer ground' of the present.

What evidence do these lines provide about Wordsworth's opinion on intellectual rigour in literary antiquarianism in 1814? On the one hand, Wordsworth implies that tales of minstrels belong to the past, rather than

18) See Ritson, *Robin Hood*, 1: 114–25. See also Percy, *Reliques*, 1: 74–86.

19) For Wordsworth's known reading of Ritson, see Wu, *WR 1800-1815*, 177–8. If Ritson's *Robin Hood* influenced this passage, Wordsworth must have seen it before the spring of 1804, when these lines were composed as an opening for Book 8 of *The Prelude*. See *The Poetical Works of William Wordsworth*, ed. Ernest De Selincourt and Helen Darbishire (2nd edition, 5 vols., Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954), 5: 415. Hereafter *PW*.

20) For the 'Pedlar' lines and their analysis, see Jonathan Wordsworth, *The Music of Humanity* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), 157–83, particularly 180–1.

to any current revival through popular antiquarian ballads or 'discovered' texts, such as the works of Thomas Percy and James Macpherson.²¹⁾ On the other hand, Wordsworth vigorously defended the literary worth of 'Ossian' (Macpherson's forged historical *persona*) in a poem of 1803. Standing at the purported sight of the fictional Ossian's tomb, he asks:

Does then the Bard sleep here indeed?
 Or is it but a groundless creed?
 What matters it? I blame them not
 Whose Fancy in this lonely Spot
 Was moved; and in this way express'd
 Their notion of its perfect rest.
 A Convent, even a hermit's Cell
 Would break the silence of this Dell:
 It is not quiet, it is not ease;
 But something deeper far than these:
 The separation that is here
 Is of the grave; and of austere
 And happy feelings of the dead:
 And, therefore, was it rightly said
 That Ossian, last of all his race!
 Lies buried in this lonely place.²²⁾

These lines are one of many examples of how, throughout his life, Wordsworth persisted in privileging the imagination (and sometimes the less developed 'Fancy') in 'these our unimaginative days'.

21) Popular ballads and antiquarian poems served as important sources for the 'experiment' of the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) by Wordsworth and Coleridge; see for example Mary Jacobus, *Tradition and Experiment in Wordsworth's Lyrical Ballads* (1798) (Oxford, 1976).

22) William Wordsworth, *Poems, in Two Volumes, and Other Poems, 1800–1807*, ed. Jared Curtis (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1983), 187–8, ll.17–32. Hereafter *PITV*.

In this way, Wordsworth's opinion aligns with the older Solitary's position (though not his feelings of despondency) that 'the surfaces of things' or 'an appearance' manifested by antiquarian fancy can raise his mind 'To an exalted pitch'—not only of 'delight' in the case of the Wanderer perhaps, but poetic creativity, in the case of the poem's Narrator (*Exc* iii. 157, 158, 160). Hence an irony: Wordsworth implicitly praises the methods of intellectual enquiry of the Solitary's youth, but depicts the 'antiquarian humour' of his old age (not a consequence of his Voltairean rationalism, but a vestige of his 'intense delight | In feeding thought, wherever thought could feed') as insufficient to sustain his spirit (*Exc* iii. 294–5). Yet Wordsworth's initial representation of the Wanderer disparages the former (antiquarianism in the Baconian spirit) and privileges the fancy or 'antiquarian humour' as a means to create a character that can compensate for the very deficiency of a moral philosophy grounded in such superficial knowledge.

We can thus conclude, from our analysis so far of the Solitary and the Wanderer, something quite remarkable about reading *The Excursion* through the perspective of antiquarianism context and allusion: the Solitary as a late-eighteenth-century natural philosopher and antiquary is a first-order literary character, while the Wanderer is a second-order literary character. The Solitary is a contemporary literary character that symbolises positive and negative aspects of certain forms of intellectual enquiry. But the Wanderer (an earlier creation, dating back to 1798) is, for all his realism, an idealised character of popular antiquarian literature, the sort of character that the Solitary himself would create as a means of 'Beguiling harmlessly the listless hours' (*Exc* iii. 140). This cyclical affirmation and condemnation of fanciful materials—the search for a balanced deployment of history and lore in the development of a new myth of the human imagination in nature—resembles what Geoffrey Hartman writes of *The Excursion* as a whole:

Imagination itself is the illness. It is also, of course, the strength of man. (Hartman 301)

It is, therefore, no coincidence that the Wanderer becomes the key figure motivating the restoration of hope and imagination in Book 4, and the rest of the poem. Yet Wordsworth complicates the uses of antiquarian knowledge even further through the character of the Pastor. The restoration of hope, imagination—and, important to the antiquarian context, intellectual enquiry—in the Solitary, effected in part by the Wanderer's antiquarian knowledge in Book 4, takes on a different tone by the poem's conclusion five books later.

The Pastor

From the poem's larger philosophical perspective, the role of the third named character, the Pastor, is ostensibly to support the Wanderer in correcting the Solitary's despondency in 'a place where nature and religion seem to join their forces... the Churchyard Among the Mountains' (Hartman 319). Through an optimistic antiquarian catalogue of ancient religions in Book 4, the Wanderer has attempted to show the Solitary the value of hope other than the hope that his 'particular current soon will reach | The unfathomable gulph, where all is still' (*Exc* iii. 997–8). But the Solitary remains unmoved, and so the poem reverts to what Hartman aptly calls the 'heaping up of exempla in the medieval manner' (Hartman 319). Hartman sees this as the epic's key weakness, in terms of its philosophical and emotional power:

The poem declines... into a massive communion with the dead, noble raptures spoken about their graves. It is the living mind and the live moment we need communion with, not the storied dust of the dead. (Hartman 296)

He goes on to write that Books 6 and 7 ('The Churchyard Among the Mountains')

add an involuntary parody of the epic *nekya* or descent to the dead. I doubt that there exists another poem of such length in which death

and tragic mutation become so literally the ground of the whole.

(Hartman 296)

These *exempla* demonstrate the usefulness of reading *The Excursion* through its antiquarian context. The Wanderer and Pastor work together to provide the epic with a clear—if perhaps viscerally unsatisfying—consolation in the form of something like the early Wordsworthian idea of the ‘One Life’ or ‘active principle’ that binds together the living and the dead. But if the reader enquires as to each character’s position on the philosophical use of popular and classical antiquities in the poem, their alignments and oppositions become more complicated.

At first glance, the Pastor’s position on antiquity appears to mediate between the Solitary’s ‘antiquarian humour’ (a rejection of philosophical examination and the rigorous application of historical knowledge, in preference for superficial fancy) and the Wanderer’s antiquarian optimism (a fancy out of British antiquity, come to life to espouse the philosophical value of ancient and medieval history). Based on the poem’s philosophical conclusion in Book 9, the Pastor should represent a formalised endorsement of the Wanderer’s belief in hope and spirit as the products of, and compensation for, the history of human suffering. The reader might assume a philosophical alignment between the Pastor and the Wanderer on this idea, and their mutual criticism of idolatry as a consequence of a misguided love of nature. But this proves a false assumption.

The Pastor represents a retrenchment of the conservative position on antiquarianism endorsed by the Church of England: that the chief value of antiquity is that it reflects the darkness and ignorance of the past, and reminds us of the perfection of the present. If Christian worshippers participated in the crimes of the ancient Britons and Saxons (as Wordsworth admits in *The Ecclesiastical Sketches*, though not in *The Excursion*), these dark moments in history are justified in hindsight through a teleological view of the history of British faith. Thus *The Excursion* ends not with the Pastor excusing the Solitary’s antiquarian fancy and confirming the Wanderer’s antiquarian faith, but with him

stating the main weakness of the Wanderer's optimistic position.

Ironically, in this way, the Pastor is just as much an antiquary as the Solitary and Wanderer are; he is an antiquary in the mould of Joseph Ritson, a repudiator of the pleasant fictions of British lore. As Hazlitt and other readers perceived, Wordsworth's three characters are 'three persons in one poet'; what he did not perceive, at least in the context of the poem's antiquarianism, is that the characters' dialogues demonstrate how Wordsworth continues to see the value in contradictory positions on antiquarian fancy, optimism, and pessimism that he has held at different stages of his thinking since his earliest mature work.

Before the Pastor's concluding hilltop sermon in Book 9, most of his comments on antiquarianism and antiquities strive to distance himself from the trope of the English antiquary. His behaviour in the second half of the poem (Books 6 and 7) largely resembles an antiquary's; he gives a long—some readers would say, tedious—catalogue of anecdotes of rural suffering and death. Although some of these incidents are remarkable in their originality and the beauty of their poetry, none of them equal the pathos and philosophical complexity of Margaret's tale in Book 1, composed almost two decades earlier. Despite the mildness of his character, the Pastor may suspect his own resemblance to the obsessive and morbid English antiquary. On one occasion he apologises for the length of his account, and on another, implies a kind of superiority to the antiquary.

The former occasion comes at the beginning of Book 8. The Pastor disparages the tediousness of antiquaries and alludes to the antiquary or collector's 'cabinet of delights'. He expresses his hope that his tales of rural life and death have not bored his three listeners, admitting that

apprehensions crossed me, in the course
Of this self-pleasing exercise, that Ye
My zeal to his would liken, who, possessed
Of some rare gems, or pictures finely wrought,
Unlocks his Cabinet, and draws them forth

One after one,—soliciting regard
 To this—and this, as worthier than the last,
 Till the Spectator, who a while was pleased
 More than the Exhibitor himself, becomes
 Weary and faint, and longs to be released. (Exc viii. 21–30)

The Pastor's description of a cabinet containing 'rare gems' and 'pictures finely wrought'—which Wordsworth after 1836 simplified to 'A cabinet stored with gems and pictures'—may allude to Samuel Rogers' argument for the simplicity of 'True Taste' (Exc 259n).²³ In his Preface to *An Epistle to a Friend* (1798), Rogers describes his vision of Horace in repose:

we find ourselves in a Sabine farm, and not in a Roman villa. His windows have every charm of prospect; but his furniture might have descended from Cincinnatus; and gems, and pictures, and old marbles, are mentioned by him more than once with a seeming indifference. (Rogers v)

Wordsworth owned a copy of the *Epistle*, a gift from the author (Wu, *WR 1800-1815* 180). The Pastor's apology echoes Rogers' description of 'True Taste', which advocates economy rather than finery, or the Solitary's antiquarian clutter in Book 2.²⁴

The Pastor's disparaging allusion to the cabinet of delights—pride of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century antiquaries, collectors, and dilettantes—does not imply his direct opposition to the materials of art

23) On the dating of this revision, see *PW* v. 266.

24) Rogers describes 'how little she ['True Taste'] requires to secure, not only the comforts, but even the elegancies of life. True Taste is an excellent Economist. She confines her choice to few objects, and delights in producing great effects by small means: while False Taste is for ever sighing after the new and the rare...' (Rogers vi). Rogers captures the harmonies and tensions between rural simplicity and cultural richness that appears so frequently in Wordsworth's own poetry; he writes of his villa: 'Thy gallery, Florence, gilds my humble walls, | And my low roof the Vatican recalls!' (Rogers 15, ll.75–6).

and antiquity, merely that he considers the behaviour of the stereotypical antiquary or collector dull and unsociable. Wordsworth does not offer his catalogue of tales in Books 6 and 7 as static objects, isolated from their original or present environment, but as examples continuous with human life, even beyond the grave. Nevertheless, in these books the Pastor uses the language and materials of antiquarianism while distancing himself from the character and behaviour of the antiquary—later implying the superiority of his own connection with the historical landscape.

This latter occasion occurs during a tale of British antiquarian lore in Book 7, the story of Sir Alfred Irthing. The tale conflates antiquarianism and folklore; the Pastor gives a detailed account of the Elizabethan knight, but begins with the phrase, 'Tradition tells...' *(Exc viii. 945)*. He mixes his received lore with the creations of his own fancy, saying of the knight's arrival in the Lakes:

A pleasing thought
I sometimes entertain, that, haply bound
To Scotland's court in service of his Queen,
Or sent a mission to some northern Chief
Of England's Realm, this Vale he might have seen... *(Exc vii. 951–5)*

The Pastor tells the tale in response to the Solitary picking out Sir Alfred's grave—the achievement of a keen antiquary, given the condition of the stone. Wordsworth writes of the Solitary:

—Right tow'rds the sacred Edifice his steps
Had been directed; and we saw him now
Intent upon a monumental Stone,
Whose uncouth Form was grafted on the wall
Or rather seemed to have grown into the side
Of the rude Pile; as oft-times trunks of trees,
Where nature works in wild and craggy spots,
Are seen incorporate with the living rock;

To endure for aye.

(*Exc* vii. 933–41)

Wordsworth makes repeated use of the phrase ‘living rock’ in his poetry, an image that conveys a sense of active nature, a continually mutable earth, both shaped (by forces natural, human, and divine) and shaping. In this passage, however, the simile of the tree and the ‘living rock’ associate the human-made world with the natural. In the context of antiquarianism, the simile suggests not only mutability but an organic and living connection between past and present. Sir Alfred’s monument, as an antiquarian object compared to a living tree, takes on a renewed vitality—just as the old chapel, compared to natural stone, takes on a sense of permanence beyond the scope of human history.

The antiquarian image of the knight’s overgrown grave by the church wall, described as a tree mingled with ‘living rock’, alludes to other literary texts with antiquarian themes. Among several eighteenth-century poets who employ this image, William Mason uses it to great effect in *Caractacus*. Mason describes the British Druids inhabiting living rock in life, rather than death:

underneath
 The soil we tread, a hundred secret paths,
 Scoop’d through the living rock in winding maze,
 Lead to as many caverns, dark, and deep:
 In which the hoary sages act their rites
 Mysterious... (Mason, *Caractacus* ll.58–63)

If Wordsworth does not allude exactly to Mason’s lines in this passage, he does so in a later sonnet. In the *Ecclesiastical Sketches* (Part 1, ‘XXII. Continued.’), he writes:

Methinks that to some vacant hermitage
 My feet would rather turn—to some dry nook
Scooped out of living rock... (SSIP 151, ll.1–3)

In addition to this direct allusion to Mason, Wordsworth would certainly have had the later books of *The Excursion* in his mind when he composed this sonnet. As De Selincourt points out, 'thorp or vill' in this sonnet (l.13) alludes to 'Thorpe and Vill' in *Excursion* viii. 102 (*PW* 3: 352).

Furthermore, Wordsworth alludes to his own earlier work when he describes Sir Alfred's grave as a synthesis of tree and rock, unified by time. Wordsworth's use of this simile recalls some of the earliest lyrical ballads: 'Lines left upon a Seat in a Yew-tree' and 'The Oak and the Broom' (*LB* 47–50, 166–9). The simile also recalls 'The Foster-Mother's Tale'—one of Coleridge's contributions to *Lyrical Ballads, 1798*—which describes a tree carved into a beam, now supporting a chapel wall.²⁵⁾

The Pastor follows the Solitary over to the 'uncouth Form' of Sir Alfred's monument and begins his tale. From the context of the tropes of English antiquarianism, his address to the Solitary is ambiguous. On the one hand his words compliment the Solitary on his keen eyesight and perspicacity; on the other hand, he implies that the Solitary (and also himself, as the repository of knowledge on the tomb's history) can perceive what the typical English antiquary cannot:

The Vicar, taking note
Of his employment, with a courteous smile
Exclaimed, 'The sagest Antiquarian's eye
That task would foil.' And, with these added words,
He thitherward advanced, 'Tradition tells
That, in Eliza's golden days, a Knight
Came on a War-horse sumptuously attired,
And fixed his home in this sequestered Vale. (Exc vii. 941–8)

The Pastor flatters the Solitary by implying that he makes an excellent antiquary. Yet the compliment, delivered in a frank and 'courteous'

25) 'You know that huge round beam | Which props the hanging wall of the old chapel?' (Owen 33, ll.21–2).

manner, contains an implicit value judgment in which the Solitary's dilettantism exceeds the skill of the 'sagest Antiquarian'. Like the Solitary's critique of monomaniacal or death-obsessed young intellectuals in Book 3, the Pastor's two brief remarks on collectors and antiquarians suggest that he finds little merit in the methods of the antiquary. Nevertheless, the Pastor exhibits both antiquarian curiosity, and the antiquary's intense concern (even obsession) with the local history and lore of the dead, and with the objects and manners of other ages. Wordsworth may set the Pastor apart from the English antiquary through the *feeling* with which he gives his catalogue of departed souls, but he never makes this comparison explicit apart from in these two comments. To return to the point made in the introduction: Wordsworth's philosophical concerns in the poem do not relate explicitly to historiographic or antiquarian methodologies, but since this is a monumental poem, a poem of the relationship between the living and the dead, the philosophical debate between his four characters embodies the antiquarian debate of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

These two comments by the Pastor alone could not suggest his representation of Wordsworth's late antiquarian self, the teleological antiquarian perspective that will develop further in the *Ecclesiastical Sketches* (1822), *Memorials of a Tour on the Continent* (1822), and *Memorials of a Tour in Italy, 1837* (1842). Until Book 9, the Pastor most closely resembles the Solitary in his intellectual methods; he is a 'true' antiquary (in the sense of a Baconian or Enlightenment philosopher) in that he demonstrates an interest in antiquarian materials, but (as in his tale of Sir Alfred) does not position his 'antiquarian humour' as a load-bearing structure in his philosophy.²⁶ The Pastor may be critical of collectors and antiquaries in passing, but he uses images of classical and popular antiquities in his own speeches.

26) For a summary of Bacon's influence on Enlightenment and Romantic thought, see Basil Willey, *The Seventeenth Century Background* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1967), 29–35.

The Pastor's language in the tale of the Migrating Pastor, for example, evokes the sense of a modern successor to the tradition of the wandering bard or strolling player in England; this tale also refers to English ballads popular among antiquaries, such as 'Fair Rosamond,' 'The Children of the Wood,' and Dick Whittington (*Exc* vii. 60–111). Furthermore, when the Migrating Pastor loses his wife and children, the Pastor describes how the Migrating Pastor's occupation—like the antiquary's or dilettante's—allows him to explore diverse interests without settling on any one, thus best satisfying his 'irregular' but 'active, ardent mind' (*Exc* vii. 115, 117).²⁷⁾

Similarly, in his encomium on 'young Oswald', the shepherd-scholar-soldier of the Lakes, the Pastor uses an analogy from Greek myth, wrapped in a simile of the 'old Bards' of classical or popular antiquity:

As old Bards

Tell in their idle songs of wandering Gods,
 Pan or Apollo, veiled in human form;
 Yet, like the sweet-breathed violet of the shade,
 Discovered in their own despite to sense
 Of Mortals, (if such fables without blame
 May find the chance-mention on this sacred ground)
 So, through a simple rustic garb's disguise,
 And through the impediment of rural cares,
 In him revealed a Scholar's genius shone;
 And so, not wholly hidden from men's sight,
 In him the spirit of a Hero walked
 Our unpretending valley. (*Exc* vii. 751–63)²⁸⁾

27) For the priest's eclecticism, see vii. 112–28 and 282–96.

28) Despite the mythological analogy, Wordsworth draws on personal experience for the character of 'young Oswald'. The Fenwick Note to this passage records: 'This young Volunteer bore the name of Dawson.... The premature death of this gallant young man was much lamented & as an attendant upon the funeral I myself witnessed the ceremony & the effect of it as described in the Poem' (Curtis 212).

Wordsworth echoes Dryden's *Aeneis* when he writes of the old bards' 'wandering Gods'. In Book 6, Aeneas appeals to the Sibyl with the words:

Give me, what Heav'n has promis'd to my Fate,
To conquer and command the *Latian* State:
To fix my wand'ring Gods; and find a place
For the long Exiles of the *Trojan* Race. (Dryden vi. 102–5, p.365)

Wordsworth had read all of Dryden's poetry 'with great attention' by 1805 (De Selincourt and Shaver 642; Wu, *WR 1770-1799* 78–9). Although Wordsworth's phrase 'wandering Gods' does not refer, as Dryden's does, to *penates*, or household gods, Wordsworth may still allude to Virgil. Wordsworth used *Aeneid* Book 6 as a source for 'Laodamia', composed October 1814 (*SP* 142–52, 529–30). He may have looked at Dryden's translation sometime between 1809–12 and remembered this image, or he may have taken the sense directly from Virgil.

These and other passing references to classical and popular antiquities, sprinkled through the Pastor's tales in Books 6 and 7, suggest an educated priest who is, of course, well versed in classical and British antiquities, especially folklore in the vein of Bourne, Brand, and Ritson (and post-*Excursion*, William Hone).²⁹⁾ However, two examples from the Pastor's speeches late in the poem (Books 7 and 9) suggest either the uncompromising rigour of Ritson's literary antiquarianism, or the ancient and Early Modern antiquarian pessimism about the ancient Britons, by authorities as chronologically distant as Julius Caesar and Henry Rowlands. These two passages stand out as the strongest opinions expressed by the Pastor on British antiquities. They cast him

29) Wordsworth owned copies of three of Ritson's collections of antiquarian poems and songs from the spring of 1808; see (Ritson, *A Select Collection of English Songs*; Ritson, *Ancient Songs*; Ritson, *Pieces*). The first volume of *A Select Collection of English Songs* and the copy of *Ancient Songs* contain marginalia by Coleridge made from late 1808 – early 1809, suggesting reading and discussion by both men (Wu, *WR 1800-1815* 177–8).

unambiguously in the camp of the conservative and Christian antiquary, condemning the ancient Britons and continental Celts for their ignorance and their adherence to a bloodthirsty Paganism.

On the question of the appropriateness of praising ancient pagan Britons as worthy ancestors, the Pastor's opinion aligns with the Solitary's (expressed after the Wanderer's paean to the peaceful nature worship of ancient religions in Book 4). Yet the Pastor never engages either the Solitary or the Wanderer in debate on this question. The fact that the only antiquarian debate in the poem occurs early on (in Book 4) and has its optimistic conclusion by the Wanderer essentially negated by the Pastor's hilltop prayer in Book 9, demonstrates that Wordsworth's overt philosophical concerns lie elsewhere. But he could not fail to be aware of the conflicting sentiments expressed about antiquity and its uses throughout the poem. References to the material and intellectual culture of British antiquities, serving his larger argument on the eternal community of the living and the dead, embody the debate from which they are excluded.

The first of the Pastor's pessimistic statements on the ancient Celts or Britons occurs as a metaphor during his tale of 'young Oswald' in Book 7. In the context of the poem's style, in this tale the Pastor reintroduces the motif raised by the Wanderer and the Solitary in their dialogues on ancient religions in Books 3 and 4. But by Book 7, this religious controversy seems to have dwindled to a metaphorical level. Content has become style, ingeniously reflecting one 'antiquarian' principle of art and literature discussed in modern literary theory. As Theodor Adorno writes:

If art opposes the empirical through the element of form—and the mediation of form and content is not to be grasped without their differentiation—the mediation is to be sought in the recognition of aesthetic form as sedimented content. What are taken to be the purest forms (e.g., traditional musical forms) can be traced back even in the smallest idiomatic detail to content such as dance. In many instances ornaments in the visual arts were once primarily cultic

symbols. Tracing aesthetic forms back to contents, such as the Warburg Institute undertook to do by following the afterlife of classical antiquity, deserves to be more broadly undertaken. The communication of artworks with what is external to them, with the world from which they blissfully or unhappily seal themselves off, occurs through noncommunication; precisely thereby they prove themselves refracted. (Adorno 5)

Unlike some early-nineteenth-century antiquary divines, the Pastor has no real interest in ancient religions as foreshadowing the revealed truth of Christianity; despite the fact that his arguments oppose the Wanderer's, his *de facto* position lies outside the debate of Book 4, since he has not yet entered the poem at that point. But the signifiers of his political metaphor in Book 7 draw on one of the deepest symbolic dichotomies in Romantic-period history and literature, namely the question of optimistic or pessimistic view of antiquities and ancient cultures.

In the Pastor's monologue, the comparison between ancient and modern religion has become a motif for political argument. The works of Bishop Robert Lowth (1710–1787) and Moses Lowman (1680–1752), celebrated by Coleridge, Wordsworth, and literary radicals of the 1790s, use similar language.³⁰ This passage demonstrates the pitfalls of oversimplifying the aesthetic, historical, political, and religious

30) See Robert Lowth, *Lectures on the Sacred Poetry of the Hebrews*, trans. G. Gregory (2 vols., London, 1787); Moses Lowman, *A Dissertation on the Civil Government of the Hebrews: in which the True Designs, and Nature of their Government are Explained*, 2nd ed. (London, 1745). Lowth's value to the first generation of Romantic poets lay in his historical approach to the interpretation of biblical prophecy; he identified the Hebrew prophets as the poets of a specific historical and social moment. See also Stephen Prickett, *Words and the Word: Language, Poetics and Biblical Interpretation* (Cambridge, 1986), 106. Coleridge's Bristol lectures on religion in 1795 draw on both Lowth and Lowman as scholars of Hebrew poetry and culture. See Nigel Leask, 'Pantisocracy and the Politics of the "Preface" to the *Lyrical Ballads*,' *Reflections of Revolution: Images of Romanticism*, eds. Alison Yarrington, et al. (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 50.

perspectives of the poem's characters; although the Pastor's political position is anti-French, he uses the religious rhetoric of Wordsworth's most republican works, such as the unpublished 'Letter to the Bishop of Llandaff' (Owen and Smyser 1: 19–66).

First, the Pastor compares Oswald during the French war to an Israelite warrior at the side of Joshua or Gideon, striving to destroy idolatry:

No braver Youth
 Descended from Judea's heights, to march
 With righteous Joshua; or appeared in arms
 When grove was felled, and altar was cast down,
 And Gideon blew the trumpet, soul-enflamed,
 And strong in hatred of Idolatry. (*Exc* vii. 833–8)³¹

Then, echoing the Solitary, the Pastor introduces his distaste for the 'impious rites' of Paganism, but now as a metaphor for French tyranny:

Why do ye quake, intimidated Thrones?
 For, not unconscious of the mighty debt
 Which to outrageous wrong the sufferer owes,
 Europe, through all her habitable Seats,
 Is thirsting for *their* overthrow, who still
 Exist, as Pagan Temples stood of old,
 By very horror of their impious rites
 Preserved; are suffered to extend their pride,
 Like cedars on the top of Lebanon
 Darkening the sun. (*Exc* vii. 858–67)³²

31) See Joshua Ch.6; Judges Ch.6–7.

32) This use of Hebrew rhetoric (as interpreted by Lowman and James Harrington) to attack French tyranny again recalls Wordsworth's republican youth. See (Fink 109; Chard 81) Zara Fink, 'Wordsworth and the English Republican Tradition,' *Journal of English and German Philology* 4 (1948): 107-26, 109; Chard, *Dissenting Republican*, 81.

Like the Pastor's tale of Sir Alfred, this last image and its context again alludes to that English poet of antiquarian materials, William Mason, this time his *English Garden*:

'Twas at that early hour, when now the sun
Behind majestic Lebanon's dark veil
Hid his ascending splendor...

(Mason, *English Garden* ii. 488–9, p.27)³³

Mason's tale of Abdalominus—the 'wise Sidonian' and his garden—probably reflects Wordsworth's idea of the state of mind of many on the Continent during the Napoleonic Wars after 1805.

The Pastor's reference to the 'impious rites' of non-specific Pagan or pre-Christian religions (whether of the British or continental Celts, or Biblical cultures) recalls the tone of many of the works of pessimistic antiquarianism known to Wordsworth, from classical to contemporary authors. The phrase also alludes to other writers who criticized ancient civilizations for their bloodthirstiness. Pope, for example, in his partial translation of the *Thebaid* by Statius, writes:

Thy own *Arcadians* there the Thunder claim,
Whose impious Rites disgrace thy mighty Name,
Who raise thy Temples where the Chariot stood
Of fierce *Oenömaus*, defil'd with Blood;
Where once his Steeds their savage Banquet found,
And Human Bones yet whiten all the Ground. (Pope 28, ll.386–91)

By using pessimistic antiquarian imagery in political metaphors, Wordsworth returns to the poetic strategy of his early work *Salisbury Plain* (1793). In French tyranny, he has found a worthy subject with which to compare the most negative aspects of ancient religion. On the other hand,

33) Book 2 of Mason's poem was published in 1777.

the possible poetic allusion to Pope, like the Pastor's comfortable use of classical myth in his description of Oswald, conveys the ambiguity of Wordsworth's position. Pope's lines critique the religion of the Solitary's 'Golden Age' from Book 3, suggesting that the Pastor remains unaware of, or unbothered by, the double standard of his dogmatic Christian perspective on ancient religion, and his classical education.

Oswald represents a brief, pure incarnation of classical myth in *The Excursion*, foreshadowing texts by the second generation of Romantic poets—poems like Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* and *Epipsychidion*, and Keats' *Endymion* and *Hyperion* poems. Wordsworth's use of classical antiquarianism in *The Excursion* strengthens an implied position that the British landscape represents a better Second Paradise on Earth than any of the ancients or moderns, even Milton, could imagine. But is this also the Pastor's philosophical position? The Pastor's language in his description of Oswald links the priest to the unquestioning philosophy of the beauty of the eternal present, offered by the Solitary in Book 3. In the Pastor's eyes, Oswald is a British shepherd boy as beautiful as Pan or Apollo in human guise; he is also, in a Miltonic act of poetic conflation, a young Israelite warrior. In Book 3, the Solitary expresses how the beauty and 'rage' of the Lake District in autumn exceeds the eternal spring of classical Arcadia:

'How benign,
 'How rich in animation and delight,
 'How bountiful these elements—compared
 'With aught, as more desirable and fair,
 'Devised by Fancy for the Golden Age;
 'Or the perpetual warbling that prevails
 'In Arcady, beneath unaltered skies,
 'Through the long year in constant quiet bound,
 'Night hush'd as night, and day serene as day! (Exc iii. 322–30)

For both the Pastor and the Solitary, then, antiquity and myth beautify or sanctify the present by offering metaphors to which the 'real' landscape

and characters of the Lakes are superior. Both men can express themselves through ‘antiquarian humour’ while (unlike the Wanderer) reserving judgment on the actual beauty and truth of past ages and their beliefs.

Yet the Pastor’s pessimistic position becomes clearer in Book 9, in which his description of British Paganism dominates the poem’s conclusion. In his hilltop prayer, the Pastor seems less preoccupied with the objects of pagan religion—its ‘Shrine, Altar, Image’—than with the human toll of the ancient faiths described in the Wanderer’s catalogue in Book 4. The Pastor describes the practice of ancient human sacrifice as a crime lodged in nature, and therefore more loathsome because of its opposition to nature’s harmony. Surveying the landscape and waters of Grasmere from the north side of Loughrigg Fell, he recounts:

Once, while the Name, Jehovah, was a sound,
 Within the circuit of this sea-girt isle,
 Unheard, the savage Nations bowed their heads
 To Gods delighting in remorseless deeds;
 Gods which themselves had fashioned, to promote
 Ill purposes, and flatter foul desires.
 Then, in the bosom of yon mountain cove,
 To those inventions of corrupted Man
 Mysterious rites were solemnized; and there,
 Amid impending rocks and gloomy woods,
 Of those dread Idols, some, perchance, received
 Such dismal service, that the loudest voice
 Of the swoln cataracts (which now are heard
 Soft murmuring) was too weak to overcome,
 Though aided by wild winds, the groans and shrieks
 Of human Victims, offered up to appease
 Or to propitiate. (*Exc ix. 679–95*)³⁴

34) ‘The point here fixed upon in my imagination is half way up the northern side of Loughrigg fell from which the Pastor & his companions are supposed to

Here the powerlessness of the 'swoln cataract' echoes the 'troubled Spirit' of the 'rumbling Stream' of the factory mill in Book 8, another personified, faintly mythological element of nature incapable of resisting injustice against human souls.³⁵ As throughout the poem (and perhaps in implicit contrast with the mythologised 'nature' of antiquarian literature), nature in *itself* does not possess the power to overcome or respond to human injustice and cruelty. Neither Jove nor Jehovah will appear to smite the practitioners of human sacrifice or transform them into rocks, trees, or animals.

In a further identification with the theme of 'What man has made of man'—whether in pagan sacrifice or industrial labour—the Pastor's vision of 'remorseless deeds' also alludes to early abolitionist poetry by Helen Maria Williams. In her poem on the slave trade, Williams uses a metaphor of pagan sacrifice to describe slavery. Williams exhorts the slave trader:

Does Avarice, your god, delight
 With agony to feast his sight?
 Does he require that victims slain,
 And human blood, his altars stain?—
 Ah, not alone of power possest
 To check each *virtue* of the breast;
 As when the numbing frosts arise,
 The charm of vegetation dies;
 His sway the harden'd bosom leads
 To Cruelty's remorseless deeds... (Williams 20, ll.307–16)

Thanks to his excellent memory for poetry, and his early love of Williams'

look upwards to the sky & mountain tops, & round the Vale with the Lake lying immediately beneath them' (Curtis 215).

35) In Book 8, Wordsworth describes one of the 'Satanic mills' of the first Industrial Revolution, 'where the Rumbling Stream, | That turns the multitude of dizzy wheels, | Glares, like a troubled Spirit, in its bed | Among the rocks below' (*Exc* viii. 179–82).

work, Wordsworth could well have remembered these lines, even in 1809–12.

At first, the Pastor's criticism remains general enough to apply to any pre-Christian religion that practiced human sacrifice. However, his accusation soon becomes more specific, no longer directed against all 'savage Nations'. He vents his polemic not against Chaldean star-worship or Greek polytheism, but against the practices of his own forbearers, the ancient Britons, including those who inhabited the Lakes. He continues:

And, if living eyes
 Had visionary faculties to see
 The thing that hath been as the thing that is,
 Aghast we might behold this spacious Mere
 Bedimmed with smoke, in wreaths voluminous,
 Flung from the body of devouring fires,
 To Taranis erected on the heights
 By priestly hands, for sacrifice, performed
 Exultingly, in view of open day
 And full assemblage of a barbarous Host;
 Or to Andates, Female Power! who gave
 (For so they fancied) glorious Victory. (Exc ix. 695–706)

The phrase 'visionary faculties' implies the benefits of an education in antiquarianism: an understanding of contemporary texts on ancient British history and lore. The Pastor's follows his supposition by a demonstration of exactly the sort of 'visionary faculties' he means, the same sort employed unconsciously by Wordsworth on Salisbury Plain in 1793: the 'antiquarian eye' that allows one to 'see | The thing that hath been as the thing that is'. Just as these faculties allow the Wanderer to perceive the sunset of British chivalry in a rural labourer's face, they allow the Pastor to transform a benevolent hilltop scene of Christian worship (which, with its address to the 'refulgent spectacle' of Grasmere at sunset, also connects Christian worship to the more benevolent nature worship of the British

Druids) into a spectacle of human sacrifice (*Exc* v. 784–800).

Several possible sources exist for Wordsworth's knowledge of the Celtic deities Taranis and Andates. References to the latter (possibly associated with Andraste, the Icenic war goddess described by Dio Cassius) seem scarce in English literature.³⁶⁾ In contrast, Romantic-period texts that mention Taranis prove more numerous. Most writers of the period who refer to Taranis, including Wordsworth, likely trace their mention of the god back to a passage in Lucan's *Pharsalia*.³⁷⁾ If Wordsworth had read a verse translation of *Pharsalia*, it would likely have been Nicholas Rowe's. Rowe's translation of the relevant lines reads:

And you where *Hesus*' horrid Altar stands,
Where dire *Teutates* human Blood demands;
Where *Taranis* by Wretches is obey'd,
And vies in Slaughter with the *Scythian* Maid...
(Rowe 1: 778–81, p.40)³⁸⁾

Lucan's subsequent lines describe the ancient Gallic bards and Druids, subjects of strong interest to Wordsworth from his early years.

Wordsworth's allusion to Taranis has precedents in contemporary

36) One early drama by Jasper Fisher (b.1591) mentions Andates, on the subject of the Roman invasion of Britain. Fisher confirms Andates as goddess of victory, but also of chaos: 'Thanks to *Andates*, whose power kingdomes feele: | *Andates*, greatest goddesse: In whose traine, | Feare, red-fac'd anger, and confusions wheele, | Murder, and Desolation runne before....' (Fisher iii.3, ll.10–17).

37) Lucan describes 'those who propitiate with horrid victims ruthless *Teutates*, and *Esus* whose savage shrine makes men shudder, and *Taranis*, whose altar is no more benign than that of *Scythian Diana*' (Lucan i. 444–6).

38) Rowe's note to these lines reads: 'These three ancient Gods of the *Gauls* were thought, *Hesus* to be the same with *Mars*, *Teutates* with *Mercury*, and *Taranis* with *Jupiter*. The Poet very justly puts a Mark of Horrour upon 'em, since they were all Three worshipp'd with Human Sacrifices, as the *Diana Taurica* was.' For a modern interpretation of this ambiguously phrased passage in Lucan, see C. M. C. Green, 'Lucan "Bellum Civile" 1.444-46: A Reconsideration,' *Classical Philology* 89.1 (January 1994): 64–9, 66.

literature, too. The Pastor's conservative criticism of Taranis resembles Odin's prophecy at the end of Robert Southey's poem 'The Death of Odin'. Southey writes:

The Druid throng shall fall away,
And sink beneath your victor sway;
No more shall nations bow the knee,
Vanquish'd Taranis, to thee;
No more upon the sacred stone,
Tentates, shall thy victims groan;
The vanquish'd Odin, Rome, shall cause thy fall,
And his destruction shake thy proud imperial wall.

(Lovell and Southey 108, ll.134–41)

Wordsworth would almost certainly have known this poem, given its early date of composition, and his own consideration of Odin or Mithridates as fit subject for an epic poem (*Prel-13* i. 185–9).³⁹⁾

The debate over the bloodthirstiness of British pagans also exists in dramatized form before *The Excursion*, in an antiquarian-themed play to which we have already seen Wordsworth allude several times in his epic: William Mason's *Caractacus*.⁴⁰⁾ *Caractacus* includes two references to Taranis. In the first, the Druid chorus bestows on Caractacus the sword Trifingus—'Stain'd with the blood of giants'—and intones:

We do adjure thee with this trusty blade,
To guard yon central oak, whose holy stem
Involves the spirit of high Taranis...

(Mason, *Caractacus* 63, l.1385; 64, ll.1397–9)

39) The Norton *Prelude* suggests that Wordsworth knew of Gibbon's remark in *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, I (1776), 246, that the story of Odin's crusade would suit epic treatment (Abrams, Wordsworth, and Gill 38, n.2).

40) Although he composed it in 1759, Mason did not publish a stage-ready form of his dramatic poem in 1777. Wordsworth seems to have first read *Caractacus* by 1791–2 (Wu, *WR 1770-1799* 97–8).

In these lines the British Druids demonstrate a protective attitude towards nature, even if only as a symbol of the power of a Pagan deity.

The second reference to Taranis in Mason's play carries stronger implications for the meaning of Wordsworth's passage in *The Excursion*. It is a late addition to the text; from 1759 onward—perhaps indicating adherence to the optimistic trend in late-eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century antiquarianism—Mason repeatedly revised one scene of his play, to make his Druids less bloodthirsty.⁴¹ Caractacus orders the sacrifice of Roman captors on the altar of Taranis. The Druid Chorus rebukes him, saying that the altar has 'never yet | Stream'd... with human gore, nor ever shall...' (Mason, *Works* 2: 160, ll.1654–5). The Chorus then demands of Caractacus:

Have not those gods their lightning? Taranis
Doth he not wield the thunder? (Mason, *Works* 2: 160, ll.1664–5)

The Druids allow Caractacus to proceed with his slaughter, but 'Not in the borrow'd weeds of sage Religion: | They suit not her' (Mason, *Works* 2: 161, ll.1669–70).

Thus, through the Pastor's final prayer, Wordsworth, like Mason, admits that the ancient Britons indulged in human sacrifice, even as he uses the Wanderer to defend the purity of the religions of 'bewildered' Pagans. Wordsworth would have known the theory popular among eighteenth-century antiquaries that trinities of pagan gods suggested evidence of a primitive monotheism, and even an anticipation of Christianity.⁴² In this optimistic antiquarian context, the Pastor's dogmatic

41) In the 1759 quarto, Caractacus orders the sacrifice of the Roman captors, and the Druid chorus does not object. In the 1777 edition of the play, revised for performance, Caractacus' speech on the fate of his Roman captives disappears almost entirely. By the 1811 text, the Druids protest Caractacus' lust for sacrifice.

42) See for example Ralph Cudworth, *The True Intellectual System of the Universe*, 2nd ed. (2 vols., London, 1743), 1: 450. This theory as it applies to the Celtic gods endured into the twentieth century. A. N. Newell asks in 1934, 'are

retrenchment seems less an attempt to break the continuity of the progress of natural religion towards enlightenment established by the Wanderer in Book 4, and more a celebration of the present state of British faith over the past. Pessimistic antiquarianism and philosophical optimism do not prove mutually exclusive. Here, as in his first version of *Salisbury Plain*, Wordsworth rejects the wholesale nostalgia for the ancient civilisations to which many eighteenth-century antiquaries fell prey. The continuation of the Pastor's above speech (see below) appears to bear out this argument.

On the other hand, from the perspective of Wordsworth's earlier works such as *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* (the second version of the poem), *The Prelude*, and *The White Doe*, the Pastor's conservative reaction to ancient religion appropriates the Wanderer's humanistic claims and brings them back into the ritualistic framework of the Church of England. This gesture seems both understandable in Wordsworth's biographical context in 1814, and somewhat suspect. From around this time, Wordsworth endorses the national church as the chief social and religious framework capable of preserving everything admirable in British history, culture, and social values. Yet his own ideas on natural religion and the One Life remain strong in the poem, and lie outside the Anglican liturgy. This dualistic position endures even to 1822, when Wordsworth writes the history of the British church in his antiquarian sonnet series *Ecclesiastical Sketches*. Therefore, it is possible to read the Pastor's final prayer as an essential rejection of the Wanderer's position, and a warning against a central trope of eighteenth-century antiquarianism.

First let us consider the former, more optimistic reading of the Pastor's concluding prayer; in this reading, the antiquarian opinions of the Wanderer, Pastor, and Solitary as essentially synthetic. The Solitary and the Pastor poke fun at antiquarian methods, myopia, and the tropes of collectors and antiquaries, while the Wanderer and the poem's narrator

Teutates, Esus, and Taranis the national deities of the Celts—a Pan-Celtic Trinity? Or are they merely local gods? Are they three gods or three aspects of one god?' (Newell 83).

respond to the Solitary as a man who has fallen into despondency as a consequence of surrendering any interest in substantial intellectual and moral enquiry, content with his 'antiquarian humour'. In the context of British antiquarianism, this reading must accept contemporary criticisms of *The Excursion* as dramatically problematic or weak; from this perspective, all four characters as versions of Wordsworth himself, with no strong differences of opinion between them. The benefit of this reading would be to locate an implicit, consistent set of opinions on antiquarianism and collecting for Wordsworth in 1814.

In the optimistic reading, for the Pastor, vindication of the human spirit stems from a rejection of the barbarisms associated with the religious rituals of antiquity. Yet, unlike the Solitary, he does not explicitly defy the Wanderer's conception of religious history. (He is absent from the debate in Books 4–5, and neither the Wanderer nor the Solitary reignite this debate in response to the Pastor's pessimistic antiquarian images in Books 7 and 9.) Wordsworth reconciles the seemingly contrary antiquarian positions of the Pastor and the Wanderer by employing images that have always produced reconciliation and harmony in his poetry: those of ruin. In this case, the Pastor celebrates the ruins of British antiquity in the landscape—its lingering cromlechs and stone circles—as a vindication of the light of Christianity over Pagan darkness:

—A few rude Monuments of mountain-stone
Survive; all else is swept away.—How bright
The appearances of things! From such, how changed
The existing worship; and, with those compared,
The Worshippers how innocent and blest!
So wide the difference, a willing mind,
At this affecting hour, might almost think
That Paradise, the lost abode of man,
Was raised again; and to a happy Few,
In its original beauty, here restored.

(Exc ix. 707–16)

Here, ruins serve the harmonizing function of reminding dwellers in the British landscape that a Second Paradise on Earth, if not present already, remains possible and imminent. The Solitary's pleasure in his habit of '[skimming] along the surfaces of things' now takes on the philosophical weight of, 'How bright | The appearances of things!' The objects to which this pleasure attaches are no longer stones mistaken for famous antiquities, but the antiquities themselves. Like the lingering shape of Stonehenge in the final stanza of *Salisbury Plain*, Pagan antiquities endure to remind modern observers—or at least those gifted with a sense more visionary than the 'sagest Antiquarian's eye'—to study antiquity as a means to thankfulness for the present, and as a warning to prevent the repetition of the crimes of history.

The latter, more dogmatic reading of the Pastor's final prayer raises the spectre of Wordsworth's attempt at a concluding self-unity in the poem that undermines or papers over the real dramatic and philosophical distinctness between his four characters, and limits the 'free play' of the reader's response to the multiple viewpoints offered by the text.⁴³⁾ The present research does not specifically consider issues of dramatic character and theories of reading; yet even within the limitations of reading the poem in its antiquarian context, the Pastor's closing words have unsettling properties. The 'rude Monuments of mountain-stone'—the unnamed British antiquities visible in the Pastor's literal or visionary sight (more probably the latter, since there are no standing stones on, or visible from, Loughrigg)—survive, but 'all else is swept away'. The Pastor is obviously talking about ancient ignorance and blood sacrifice, but the line of poetry effaces even the names of the stones, a poetic gesture that carries all before it into silence.

43) This idea comes from Wolfgang Iser's work on eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels: 'Instead of offering the reader a single and consistent perspective, through which he is supposed to look on the events narrated, the author provides him with a bundle of multiple viewpoints, the centre of which is continuously shifted. These comments thus open a certain free play for evaluation and permit new gaps to arise in the text' (Iser 19–20). Quoted in Bushell 142.

The 'lost abode of man' that replaces it resembles less an enlightened Second Paradise than a copy of the original; indeed, the Pastor's metaphor looks backwards to Genesis rather than forwards, in contrast to an earlier millennial invocation (*Exc* ix. 622–35). His warning against the Pagan ignorance of the past become fulfilled by Christian ignorance *about* the past. The beauty of the present resembles the Solitary's wish in Book 3 to 'decline | All act of inquisition whence we rise, | And what, when breath has ceased, we may become' (*Exc* iii. 239–41). This 'bright and breathing World' is fulfilled in the hilltop sunset of Book 9, reminiscent to the modern reader of another brave new world:

He waved his hand; and it was as though, with an invisible feather whisk, he had brushed away a little dust, and the dust was Harappa, was Ur of the Chaldees; some spider-webs, and they were Thebes and Babylon and Cnossos and Mycenae. Whisk. Whisk—and where was Odysseus, where was Job, where were Jupiter and Gotama and Jesus? Whisk—and those specks of antique dirt called Athens and Rome, Jerusalem and the Middle Kingdom—all were gone. Whisk—the place where Italy had been was empty. Whisk, the cathedrals; whisk, whisk, *King Lear* and the Thoughts of Pascal. Whisk, Passion; whisk, Requiem; whisk, Symphony; whisk... (Huxley 35)

Thus in this more pessimistic reading of the Pastor's final pessimistic antiquarian speech, the Pastor, like the Solitary in Book 3, surrenders his own methods of historiography and intellectual enquiry, which, he has occasionally suggested, are superior to the antiquary's. He does not consider that the epithet of a 'few rude Monuments of mountain-stone', that represent all that remains of the British Pagans, will soon apply to the Christian gravestones of his own parishioners (indeed, many have already lost their epitaphs thanks to the work of time and weather). The tales of their lives, the oral epitaphs that make up so much of *The Excursion*, will also be 'swept away'. What will come in their place—'Paradise', or more 'inventions of corrupted Man' (*Exc* ix. 686)?

Conclusion

The Romantic-period antiquarian background manifests in *The Excursion* as effaced elegiac that echoes the overt elegiac of the poem: a series of monologues and dialogues on the relationship between the living and the dead in a specific natural and social landscape, and the uses of history and memory to generate hope. Even the Wanderer, who deploys his optimistic account of ancient religion in Book 4 as a cure for the Solitary's despondency, dwells on the importance of hope and futurity to human life in the opening lines of Book 9:

The food of hope
Is meditated action; robbed of this,
Her sole support, she languishes and dies.
We perish also; for we live by hope
And by desire; we see by the glad light,
And breathe the sweet air of futurity,
And so we live, or else we have no life. (Exc ix. 20–6)

The ancient history of human faith, and the Pastor's more recent historical accounts of human affections and endurance, must inspire 'meditated action' in order to serve the living; the myopia and morbidness of the stereotypical English antiquary have no useful place in this inspiring historiographical methodology. In fact, by the poem's conclusion in Book 9, the furthest back into the past that the Wanderer peers is to that great Wordsworthian shrine, the individual childhood. In the Wanderer's metaphorical language, the adult soul is a literal 'altar' fed not with human sacrifice, but with 'choral song' and 'incense' of childhood memory (Exc ix. 45, 42, 43).

Yet despite this philosophical conclusion that draws on the 'Pedlar' lines of 1798, the blank verse fragments of 1799 ('There is an active principle...'), *The Prelude*, and the great *Ode* of 1802–5, we cannot forget that much of *The Excursion* consists of standing by graveyards and abandoned dwellings and pondering the connection between the living

and the dead. *The Excursion* is not only an epitaphic epic, then, but an epic that makes strong contentions about the uses of epitaph, local history, and the 'deep' history of ancient and even prehistoric Britain. This paper concludes that these contentions—optimistic and pessimistic, 'scientific' and fanciful—do not map neatly on to the three named characters that accompany the poem's narrator, nor remain consistent between them.

In the poem's overt philosophical argument in Books 2–7, the Wanderer and the Pastor work to restore the Solitary from his condition of moral despondency, which, as argued above, contains a dimension of antiquarian superficiality, but also a portrait of a man who was once committed to rigorous antiquarian investigation of the world around him through Enlightenment methods of natural philosophy and antiquarianism. Furthermore, this paper has gone on to demonstrate that, in contrast to the antiquarian dimension of the overt argument, the Solitary and the Pastor align in terms of their antiquarian interests and methodologies, their mild disdain for, or superiority to, other English antiquaries, and their more realistic or pessimistic opinions of ancient Britons. In this context, the Wanderer becomes the outlier and liminal figure in the poem, moving between not past and present, question and answer, but between literary genres. He is a figure of British popular antiquarianism, placed anachronistically into a debate about the worth of his own existence to human life.

What Adorno writes about the relationship between modern aesthetics and art serves as a useful analogy for the relationship between poetry and history in *The Excursion*:

It is outside the purview of aesthetics today whether it is to become art's necrology; yet it must not play at delivering graveside sermons, certifying the end, savouring the past, and abdicating in favor of one sort of barbarism that is no better than the culture that has earned barbarism as recompense for its own monstrosity. Whether art is abolished, perishes, or despairingly hangs on, it is not mandated that the content [*Gehalt*] of past art perish. (Adorno 4)

Looking back on the poem's narrative in Books 3–7 from the perspective of Book 9, it seems that much of *The Excursion* consists of graveside sermons for history: 'certifying the end, savouring the past,' and then abdicating not in favour of the barbarism of epic poetry without history, but a celebratory ahistorical poetry in which the proclaimed ignorance of the distant past cannot be anticipated to apply to the recent past, or the present.

If this is Wordsworth's own view (and by extension, perhaps the view of the poem's Narrator), then the positions of the Solitary and the Wanderer persist through the poem both as declarations of Wordsworth's earlier optimism, and a warning on the dangers of dismissing and effacing the more 'fanciful' methods of intellectual enquiry and poetic creation, mistakenly identified by the Wanderer and the Pastor as complicit in (if not causal to) the Solitary's despondency. The Solitary's 'antiquarian humour' and the Wanderer's belief in an enduring benevolence in human history represent—with or without Wordsworth's agreement—an undermining of the irony surrounding the two tropes to which these characters are so easily associated: the Solitary as the old, grief-enfeebled natural philosopher or English antiquary, and the Wanderer as the impossible, idealised British bard, the fundamental archetype of poetic power and magic about whom Wordsworth writes in the Alfoxden Notebook of January–March 1798:

His eye was like the star of Jove
 When in a storm its radiance comes & goes
 As winds drive on the thin invisible clouds...

The Excursion's overarching philosophical argument (though one hardly exists) neither celebrates nor forgives these tropes of philosophical enquiry or poetic truth. Antiquarianism remains, in *The Excursion* and Wordsworth's later poetry, as it has always remained as a field of knowledge: suspect for its lack of completeness, its lack of connection to human life. Yet, as this paper has attempted to demonstrate, Wordsworth

cannot use the materials of British antiquarianism in culture and literature—materials he has been drawn to for poetic ends, throughout his life—without establishing a secure space for them in his epic elegy for ancient and recent history.

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Abstract

William Wordsworth's first published epic poem, *The Excursion* (1814), is an 'elegiac epic' concerned with how traces of former human existence in the local landscape (graves, epitaphs, and tales of life and death) affect feelings of despair and hope among the living. Eschewing traditional historicist approaches to the poem, this paper locates a strong intertextual relationship between arguments made by the poem's three main characters and the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century field of antiquarianism. The characters of the Solitary, the Wanderer, and the Pastor deploy the materials, methods, and ideologies of antiquarianism to convey both similar and contrasting positions on moral philosophy, religion, and historiography. Comparing the antiquarian images, language, and allusions used by the three characters dispels the sense of an author's unified position in the debate. The three characters' opinions may reflect Wordsworth's positions on the uses of antiquarianism in philosophical, religious, and political debates at different stages of his life, but antiquarianism remains an ambiguous text in the poem, associated with a range of philosophical positions and feelings. The paper illuminates a number of key antiquarian expressions in the poem, and allusions to antiquarianism in contemporary literary texts. The paper concludes that each of the three characters' relationships to antiquarianism in the poem subverts the others. The Solitary is diagnosed with 'despondency', but his antiquarian characteristics serve as examples of past and present intellectual and moral strength. The Wanderer represents a position of antiquarian optimism, but is himself a second-order antiquarian character in the text, a fiction in which the other two characters may not believe. Finally, the Pastor appears to support the Wanderer's optimistic use of antiquarian materials and methods to 'cure' the Solitary, but in fact negates the Wanderer's optimistic and fanciful historiography with a pessimistic and solipsistic reduction of antiquarianism to Christian dogma. An intertextual approach that considers *The Excursion* in relation to antiquarianism demonstrates the multiplicity of historiographic

perspectives in the poem, and Wordsworth's willingness to allow different and conflicting stages of his thoughts and feelings free play in the poem's dialogues.