

# Wordsworth's Cabinets and Virtuosi: Unstable Forms of Knowledge in *The Prelude*

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## Introduction

This paper examines examples of the language of the *Kunstkammer* or *Wunderkammer* (the collector's cabinet of art, antiquities, 'curiosities', and 'wonders'), and the character of the 'virtuoso' (the collector, antiquary, connoisseur, and natural philosopher) and its parodies in William Wordsworth's autobiographical epic poem, *The Prelude*. A reading of four passages related to cabinets and virtuosos invites discussion of the text's complex positions on nature, classification, and mechanistic philosophy in the context of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century epistemologies.

The paper argues that the images of the 'cabinet' and the 'virtuoso' are highly unstable signifiers in their historical contexts. These images allow the poem to simultaneously critique opposing forces in intellectual history. On the one hand, these images critique the naturalism of the 'New Science' of the Enlightenment—the legacy of Bacon, Kepler, Descartes, and Locke—while making assumptions about its mechanistic and utilitarian goals, and its devotion to classifying and categorising objects and phenomena. On the other hand, these images also carry an implicit critique of the supernatural scholasticism of the classical and pre-Early-Modern periods, which manifests in the late eighteenth century as retrograde antiquarianism, scientific dilettantism, and the character of the myopic antiquary or collector. Here the text makes contrasting assumptions about the disorder, anti-historicism, and superstitions of the *Kunstkammer* as the prototypical museum. While these texts generally position Wordsworth against mechanistic natural philosophy, in favour of a more superstitious scholasticism, they simultaneously display a methodical, analytical

Enlightenment mind at work. *The Prelude's* ultimate critique of the virtuoso turned man of business, the modern 'Dwarf Man' virtuoso, does not attack the diversity of his knowledge, but its ironic incompleteness based on the fields it neglects. Wordsworth displays the reasoning of a transitional, Baconian natural philosopher—in the vein of Thomas Browne and John Evelyn—by pointing out the dangers of discarding the materials of the fancy, to the development of the human mind.

Through readings of passages of cabinets and virtuosos in Books 2, 3, and 5 of *The Prelude*, the paper will argue that Wordsworth's occasional use of these images in his work—what he might term objects removed from context in order to be classified, arranged, and positioned 'In disconnection, dead and spiritless'—significantly bears on a central concern in his poetry: the relationship between history, nature, and the creative imagination. The paper will analyse in detail the two passages from Book 2 and 3 that specifically use the word 'cabinet'. The paper will then analyse descriptions of two virtuosos or collectors from *Prelude* Book 5—one positive and one parodic. The paper concludes that the *Prelude* uses unstable images of the cabinet, the museum, and the virtuoso to intuit or move towards a description of the role of the creative imagination in the observation of nature—a striving for a sense of organism against the grid of natural classification in the early nineteenth century.

### **Theoretical and Historical Contexts**

The tension between scholasticism and naturalism has implications for the reader's conceptions of history, fancy, and imagination in Wordsworth texts. Basil Willey first traced the tension between scholasticism and naturalism in Wordsworth's poetry. Willey categorised a number of seventeenth-century thinkers as to their position between the 'scholasticism' of Aristotle and its Christian development in Thomas Aquinas, on the one hand; and the empiricism of Galileo, Francis Bacon, and Descartes on the other, which culminated in the 'overthrow' of scholasticism by Newton. Willey concludes his study with a discussion of Wordsworth as a poet-philosopher reacting against this overthrow at the

end of the eighteenth century, and as an advocate for intellectual enquiry that tempers naturalism with spirituality. Willey writes, in sympathy with Wordsworth:

We may not want these 'truths' [of religious experience to be] theologically and metaphysically expressed; but we do want to be able to experience reality in all its rich multiplicity, instead of being condemned by the modern consciousness to go on 'Viewing all objects, unremittingly | In disconnection dead and spiritless.'

(Willey 28) (W. Wordsworth, *Exc* iv. 957–8)

While some of Wordsworth's texts may represent late-eighteenth-century reactions against the mechanistic philosophy of Descartes, Newton, and the eighteenth-century natural philosophers that succeeded them, these texts also demonstrate the influence of the systems and methods of Enlightenment education and enquiry. This paper argues that the images and ideas of the cabinet and virtuoso make useful symbolic representations of sites of intellectual and spiritual debate in his texts.

To bring Willey's insights into the context of recent critical theory, we can read this tension in Wordsworth's texts not only in the historical context of intellectual history, but through several poststructuralist writers of knowledge theory.

Late twentieth-century scholarship has elaborated Wordsworth's relationship to the Enlightenment, and the shifting ground of history in his poetry (Bewell; Liu). Following from Alan Liu's poststructuralist approach, we can read the tensions between scholasticism and naturalism in Wordsworth through the different kinds of history described by Michel Foucault (Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History"). Foucault illuminates the difference between traditional 'history' and what he terms 'genealogy'—that is, a painstaking examination of 'what history has despised or neglected' (Payne 17). Genealogy does not repudiate history, but opposes 'history's determined search for origins' and the notion that 'origins can be recovered' (Payne 18). This theory illuminates the types of

knowledge at work in *The Prelude*, since the text demonstrates repeated concerns for the search for origins and essence; at the same time, it demonstrates careful observation of, and abundant subtleties and differences within, and between, self and world. The text also demonstrates an awareness of the intellectual, economic, political, military, and other power structures at work in the societies that shape the narrator's development.

### **Classification in Wordsworth: Words and Things**

Wordsworth's texts contain ambiguous and shifting arguments regarding the role of observation, classification, and the unity or selfhood of individual organisms. Michel Foucault's examination of the development of classification in natural history during what he terms the 'Classical' period (equivalent to northern European late Renaissance and Baroque, ca.1540–1740), questions some longstanding assumptions and conclusions in the history of thought (Foucault, *Order of Things*). A detailed re-examination of the scholastic-naturalistic dialectic traced in Wordsworth by Willey requires an examination of these assumptions and conclusions.

Foucault begins by critiquing the position of historians such as Willey who

believe that they can discover the traces of a major conflict between a theology that sees the providence of God and the simplicity, mystery, and foresight of his ways residing beneath each form and in all its movements, and a science that is already attempting to define the autonomy of nature. They also recognize the contradiction between a science still too attached to the old pre-eminence of astronomy, mechanics, and optics, and another science that already suspects all the irreducible and specific contents there may be in the realms of life. (Foucault, *Order of Things* 138)<sup>1)</sup>

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1) According to this rationalist, progressive reading of scientific development, the

Foucault's enquiry bears on the debate about the nature and definition of Romanticism at the end of the eighteenth century. With relevance to Wordsworth, Foucault argues that scholastic, Cartesian, and Newtonian epistemes before the eighteenth century are 'alien' to the sciences of evolution and the 'notion of organism' in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, instead of representing a continuity of thought (Foucault, *Order of Things* 139). Nor did the latter arise from the former through an intuitive assumption (in hindsight) that the complex arises from the simple—the 'strange richness' of the world investigated by the biological sciences growing out of the 'laws of rectilinear movement' (Foucault, *Order of Things* 139).

Instead, Foucault argues convincingly for the development of natural history out of a new gap 'between things and words'—a development in representation.<sup>2)</sup> This paper suggests that Wordsworth's texts do not express concern over 'new' scientific methods in the abstract, but that they express repeated unease from an awareness that these methods relate to the eighteenth-century shifts in representation through which Wordsworth's texts comes into existence: the observation of the human and natural worlds, and their recording in linear verse.

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'Mechanism and theology' of scholasticism and Early Modern Cartesian thought becomes opposed by 'irreligion and a... confused intuition of life' which 'is supposed to have provided the still obscure and fettered endeavours of the eighteenth with their positive and rational fulfilment in a science of life which did not need to sacrifice rationality in order to preserve in the very quick of its consciousness the specificity of living things, and that somewhat subterranean warmth which circulates between them—the object of our knowledge—and us, who are here to know them' (Foucault, *Order of Things* 138).

- 2) 'The division, so evident to us, between what we see, what others have observed and handed down, and what others imagine or naïvely believe, the great tripartition, apparently so simple and so immediate, into *Observation*, *Document*, and *Fable*, did not exist. And this was not because science was hesitating between a rational vocation and the vast weight of naïve tradition, but for the much more precise and much more constraining reason that signs were then part of things themselves, whereas in the seventeenth century they become modes of representation' (Foucault, *Order of Things* 140–1).

Therefore, we can read the arguments and conflicts that arise in the *Prelude* texts below more productively than against the dialectic of scholasticism and naturalism described by Willey, if we consider that representation, at the end of the eighteenth century, had started to isolate the 'thing'—the object of the poet or philosopher's gaze—from its own history, by stripping away the accumulated language associated with the thing, that established its being to observers, going back to the Middle Ages:

Until the mid-seventeenth century, the historian's task was to establish the great compilation of documents and signs—of everything, throughout the world, that might form a mark, as it were. It was the historian's responsibility to restore to language all the words that had been buried. His existence was defined not so much by what he saw as by what he retold, by a secondary speech which pronounced afresh so many words that had been muffled. (Foucault, *Order of Things* 142)

In contrast, the legacy of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries would be the development of a purely descriptive language, an attempt to 'see things as they are'.<sup>3)</sup> In the retrospective theoretical framework proposed for the *Lyrical Ballads*, the Preface asserts that the poet should attempt a task something like the natural historian's: that is, to observe nature ('the entire world of nature') and human life ('the great and universal passions of men') by seeing and hearing, and then recording these observations in the clearest possible language (the 'real language of men') (Gill 608).

Foucault brings to this analogy the realisation that such a new kind of seeing, such a 'purification' of descriptive language, did not depend on seeing, for the first time, a rich natural world that was previously invisible until illuminated by a rational, meticulous language that grew out of

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3) 'Let good men feel the soul of Nature | And see things as they are' (Jordan ll.954–5).

advances in optics and mechanics (Foucault, *Order of Things* 142–4). On the contrary, the new kind of seeing that arose with natural history depended on seeing *less*, rather than seeing *more*. The work of natural history from the late seventeenth to early eighteenth centuries was, from Foucault's perspective, to

reduce this distance between them [things and language] so as to bring language as close as possible to the observing gaze, and the things observed as close as possible to words. Natural history is nothing more than the nomination of the visible. Hence its apparent simplicity... (Foucault, *Order of Things* 144)

Thus with a similar thrust as his argument regarding history *vs.* genealogy, Foucault reminds us that the scholars of classical Greece and Rome, and the Middle Ages, did not suffer from inattentiveness or myopia. The ineffective historian's privilege asserts the benevolence of hindsight: the rise of human achievement out of a steadily accumulating wisdom and steadily more accurate methodologies.

Instead, the revolution of Enlightenment naturalists lay in the narrowing of the field of vision.<sup>4)</sup> Foucault also notes that this reductionism or deliberate narrowing of the field of vision applies to the optical tools of scientific advance during this period also—a point to remember when we

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4) 'Natural history did not become possible because men looked harder and more closely. One might say, strictly speaking, that the Classical [i.e. Enlightenment] age used its ingenuity, if not to see as little as possible, at least to restrict deliberately the area of its experience. Observation, from the seventeenth century onward, is a perceptible knowledge furnished with a series of systematically negative conditions. Hearsay is excluded, that goes without saying; but so are taste and smell, because their lack of certainty and their variability render impossible any analysis into distinct elements that could be universally acceptable. The sense of touch is very narrowly limited... which leaves sight with an almost exclusive privilege, being the sense by which we perceive extent and establish proof, and, in consequence, the means to an analysis *partes extra partes* acceptable to everyone: the blind man in the eighteenth century can perfectly well be a geometrician, but he cannot be a naturalist' (Foucault, *Order of Things* 144–5).

read that the Dwarf Man virtuoso in *Prelude* Book 5 uses telescopes.<sup>5)</sup> Therefore, we can read some of the tensions and antipathies in the Wordsworth texts below as part of a larger uneasiness running through the sciences and literature of the late eighteenth century, in which the language of the poetry in *The Prelude* simultaneously becomes possible through the Enlightenment gap in representation (systemizations and exactitudes of observation and description), and through this language discovers the ability to express a longing for the other, earlier sort of history: the totalizing description, the attention to the organism as a whole, the history of a thing as the thing itself.

The poetry of *Prelude* Book 2 perceptively locates its antagonist in the early museum or natural history collection. As Foucault describes:

At the institutional level, the inevitable correlatives of this patterning [i.e. classifying plants and animals according only to their external characteristics] were botanical gardens and natural history collections. And their importance, for Classical culture, does not lie essentially in what they make it possible to see, but in what they hide and in what, by this process of obliteration, they allow to emerge: they screen off anatomy and function, they conceal the organism, in order to raise up before the eyes of those who await the truth the visible relief of forms, with their elements, their mode of distribution, and their measurements. (Foucault, *Order of Things* 150)

The argument of the text, in describing classification systems and their weaknesses, thus often becomes caught between the new clarity of observation possible in the visible world, and the intuited 'invisible world' of individual organisms, and the continuities between them (W.

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5) '[It] was the same complex of negative conditions that limited the realm of experience and made the use of optical instruments possible. To attempt to improve one's power of observation by looking through a lens, one must renounce the attempt to achieve knowledge by means of the other senses or from hearsay' (Foucault, *Order of Things* 145).



Wordsworth, 1805 *Prel* vi.536).

In summary: read through Willey's dialectic of scholasticism and naturalism, and Foucault's ideas of genealogy, natural history, and representation, these examples that follow of cabinets and virtuosos in *The Prelude* show how these passages deploy the cabinet and virtuoso as reversible symbols of the tension between scholasticism and naturalism (empirical science), between supernaturalism and realism, and between history and genealogy, in order to represent the poet's hopes for self-unity and self-knowledge in the text. The text of Book 2 opposes Wordsworth's assertion that the soul is difficult to analyse because it 'Hath no beginning' against a symbol (the 'cabinet of sensations') that embodies as much of a denial of beginnings (objects separated from their sources, contexts, and *Litteraria*) as it does of meticulous scientific analysis.<sup>6)</sup> To use Roland Barthes' term, the texts of these passages are excitingly 'reversible', because the contradictions they embody allow the reader to engage with the problems raised in Wordsworth's argument—to further the argument in ways that Wordsworth cannot.

### **The *Kunstkammer* and Mechanistic Philosophy**

In contrast to Foucault, Horst Bredekamp makes a more gradualist argument. Bredekamp offers evidence from the history of collecting and cabinets to show that the historicization of natural history, and the

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6) Liu demonstrates how texts such as *The Prelude* can attempt to use 'nature' as a mirror to reflect the self and occlude history, but the bones of history nevertheless poke through the georgic landscape. In my analysis of *Prelude* passages below, Wordsworth does not attempt to interpose a mirror of nature, but confronts the epistemes of natural history directly as a means of analysing his feelings of a debt to, and origin in, nature. This reading does not deny the concealing methods of subjectivity in Liu; to extend his metaphor, Wordsworth attempts to look at nature and his own mind through the lens of natural history and antiquity, but this lens exerts distorting as well as sharpening effects on the text. Sometimes these histories function as a mirror rather than a lens; at other times they function as a lens, but not the lens Wordsworth thinks it is (e.g. a historicizing telescope mistakenly used to look at a close-up object or set of objects, or a magnifying glass used to look at a landscape).

development of Enlightenment philosophy, owe much to the collectors of *Kunstkammern* from 1540–1740. Bredekamp cites Kant's division of natural history into *Naturbeschreibung* (nature study) and *Naturgeschichte* (natural history) in 1775 as a milestone of the historicization of natural history.<sup>7)</sup> Bredekamp argues:

Though the idea of expanding the notion of natural history to cover periods of *time*—as distinct from classical descriptions of nature limited to a particular *space*—seemed radical at the time, it was hardly new. It actually derived from visual observations that had been made with respect to the collections of the *Kunstkammer* for more than 200 years. (Bredekamp 8)

Bredekamp's offers the thesis that the apparent disorganisation of the *Kunstkammern* partially masked their organisational methodologies, and their engagement with the development of historicity.

Bredekamp argues that the cabinets' interdisciplinary, transhistorical organisation—juxtaposing natural objects, antiquities, and modern machines—helped to inspire the development of modern natural history:

given their somewhat suggestive name—'Cabinets of Art and Curiosities'—the *Kunstkammern* seemed to smack of the pre-scientific period and the bizarre, so that despite more recent efforts to restructure the collections, the natural philosophy aspect of their systematic organization was not apparent in the inventories and their underlying philosophies. Having built up an inventory of human technical and artistic skills in two distinct and disparate areas—ancient sculpture and modern machines—these collections gave rise to a kind of dynamic historical reflection that penetrated even into

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7) Bredekamp cites Kant's essay *Von den verschiedenen Racen der Menschen* [On the Different Races of Man] (1775) (Kant; Bredekamp 8). For an English edition of this essay, see for example *Race and the Enlightenment: A Reader*, ed. Emmanuel Chukwudi Eze (Blackwell, 1997) (Eze 38–48).

the area of natural history.... the historicization of nature was already underway within the slope of the *Kunstkammern* from the 16<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. (Bredekamp 9)

While Bredekamp disagrees with Foucault as to how the historicization of nature occurred in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, both Foucault and Bredekamp's differing interpretations of the rise and fall of the *Kunstammer*, and the corresponding rise of the natural philosopher, prove applicable in different ways to the reading of the *Prelude* passages below.

However, Bredekamp's analysis is particularly useful in that it offers an explanation for why Wordsworth equates the collector's cabinet with Enlightenment science rather than eclectic scholasticism. Foucault suggests that the break with the heterogeneity of classification occurs through a discarding of accumulated or extraneous knowledge—the *Litteraria*—and a focus on limited visual description: a mode of perception fatal to the *Kunstammer*. This would align the cabinet of curiosities with the pre-scientific world, the world of scholasticism and superstition through which, as Willey argues, Wordsworth attempts to restore curiosity at, and wonder in, nature. If Wordsworth feels anxiety about the mechanisation of nature after Boyle and Newton, then we might think that any image of a *Kunstammer* in his poetry would represent an intellectual preference for a pre-Newtonian scholasticism, or mixed scholastic-naturalistic epistemes, of the kind that appear in Bacon, Thomas Browne, and John Evelyn.

Instead, we see the opposite; at least in *Prelude* Book 2, Wordsworth equates the basic metaphor of the human mind as a cabinet with a distaste for classification. Bredekamp's theory offers an explanation: unlike Foucault, Bredekamp suggests that the *Kunstammer* proved vital to the development of the thought of Kepler, Descartes, and Locke (Bredekamp 37–45). Bredekamp describes the automata and machines collected in *Kunstkammern* as inspiration for the idea of God as *mechanikos* or 'divine clockmaker' (Bredekamp 39). He cites Kepler's delight in a display of automata in 1598; the writing of Henri de Monantheuil in the court of Henri IV; and perhaps most importantly, Descartes 1647 remark, 'Je ne

reconnois aucune difference entre les machines que font les artisans [et] les divers corps que la nature seule compose' (I can see no difference between machines made by artisans and the various things created by nature alone) (Bredekamp 39).<sup>8)</sup>

Bredekamp then traces how images of Descartes frequently appeared in *Kunstkammern* and paintings representing the diversity of natural philosophy. Towards the end of the seventeenth century Johann Daniel Major, in his treatise on cabinets, described humanity as 'the finest of nature's clockworks', and how human curiosity, embodied in the desire to collect, 'represented a bridge in time leading back to, or beyond, the blissful state of knowledge that had existed prior to the Fall' (Major §5, p.A4v.) (in Bredekamp 40). Similarly, John Locke uses the metaphor of filling a collector's cabinet as an alternative description to the *tabula rasa*:

the Understanding is not much unlike a Closet wholly shut from light, with only some little openings left, to let in external visible Resemblances, or Ideas of things without; would the Pictures coming into such a dark Room but stay there, and lie so orderly as to be found upon occasion, it would very much resemble the Understanding of a Man, in reference to all Objects of sight, and the Ideas of them. (Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* bk. II, ch. xi, §17, p.72) (cited in Bredekamp 41)

The strong connections between the *Kunstkammer* and Cartesian mechanism—hints of which appear in *Prelude* Books 2 and 5—thus explains Wordsworth's antipathy to the cabinet. In turning back from mechanistic philosophy towards the spiritual unity of scholasticism, Wordsworth finds enemies in the *Kunstkammer* and the utilitarian virtuoso, as symbols of the beginning of the end of unmediated human contact with nature. Through diachronic, syncretic or heterogeneous readings of the

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8) Bredekamp cites René Descartes, *Les Principes de la Philosophie*, in his *Oeuvres* (9 vols., Paris, 1978) (Descartes).

disorganised cabinet and the classified museum, the pedantic virtuoso and the virtuoso man of business, Wordsworth finds an enemy in both sides of the scholastic-naturalistic dialectic for the same reasons: both have lost touch with the truths of nature and the human spirit.

In summary: on the one hand, Foucault's interpretation of the rise of classification during the seventeenth century suggests one source for Wordsworth's anti-cabinet, anti-museum anxieties in *Prelude* Book 2 below—a desire for self-unity and a dynamic engagement with nature, rather than one that is entirely visual, synchronic, and fixed (and therefore 'dead'). On the other hand, Bredekamp's contrasting interpretation does not allay these anxieties in the text, but adds another dimension. In looking to scholasticism for solace or inspiration, Wordsworth discovers anxiety towards antiquity as a mediator in his experience of nature, because a passion for historicized antiquity gave rise to the achievements of Kepler, Descartes and Locke—to mechanism. The image of the 'disorganised' *Kunstkammer* or early museum whispers to Wordsworth that nature, antiquity, art, and machines are co-dependent forces in humanity's search for self-knowledge.

### **The Character of the Virtuoso**

Just as images of cabinets and museums appear occasionally at key moments in Wordsworth's texts, so too appear images of the cabinet's owner—the collector, the antiquary, or the polymath philosopher. Willey describes how seventeenth-century metaphysicians such as Sir Thomas Browne (admired by Coleridge and read by Wordsworth) represent liminal figures in the British transition from scholasticism to naturalism, the mechanism of which Foucault describes as occurring through changes in representation. During the Renaissance and seventeenth century, the archetypal cultural figure that embodied this transition was the collector of rarities or *virtu*—the virtuoso. Walter Houghton confronted the complex definition and shifting identity of the virtuoso over two centuries in a definitive short study in the 1940s.

Houghton notes that the character of the virtuoso has been difficult to

define since its first use in English in the seventeenth century.<sup>9)</sup> Writers apply the term to art collectors (the ‘connoisseurs’ of the eighteenth century); antiquaries; and natural philosophers—yet not as discrete categories of virtuosi.<sup>10)</sup> Houghton’s identification of social class and socioeconomic utility as factors bearing on the definition of the virtuoso have important repercussions for the criticism levelled at the modern virtuoso or polymath in *Prelude* Book 5:

the virtuoso is clearly a man of wealth and leisure: he is a gentleman, and we shall see that the movement was strongly class-conscious. But he is also a student. Whatever the subject, it is not a mere accomplishment, or an occasional recreation; it is a study to which he devotes much of his time, and in which he is, or pretends to be, something of an authority. And finally, his studies are never devoted to utilitarian ends, no more to political or professional success than to commercial gain. (Houghton, “Virtuoso 1” 53–4)

Houghton also describes how, from the start, users of the term ‘virtuoso’ demonstrated awareness that the term could be applied to both able and inept enquirers into nature—a division that could be used to divide the dilettantes from the ‘sincere’ philosophers (Houghton, “Virtuoso 1” 54).<sup>11)</sup>

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- 9) (Houghton, “Virtuoso 1” 52) Henry Peacham imports the Italian term into English in 1634, to describe ‘princely minds’ (Peacham XII, p.105). John Evelyn uses the term in his diary on 1 March 1644 (Evelyn II, p.114) (cited in *OED*).
- 10) ‘The range of interest precludes any definition of virtuosity based on subject matter. All we can say is that painting, antiquities, and science are the major concerns, though in saying so, we must not assume that therefore we have three distinct types of the virtuoso. The character of Mary Astell is not merely a natural scientist, he is also an antiquary: “his Cash consists much in old Coins, and he thinks the Face of Alexander in one of ‘em worth more than all his Conquests.” The normal case indeed would include the study of all three subjects’ (Houghton, “Virtuoso 1” 53).
- 11) ‘There is no study more becoming a rational creature than that of natural philosophy; but, as several of our modern virtuosi manage it, their speculations do not so much tend to open and enlarge the mind, as to contract and fix it

Houghton presses beyond the binary division between the natural philosopher as a scholar devoted to utility and economy, and the virtuoso as a scholar devoted to knowledge for its own sake, by asking what kind of intrinsic knowledge is at stake in the virtuoso's profession. Following Bacon, Houghton concludes that, to the virtuoso,

Coins or pictures, shells or insects, none are valued for use, neither for the advancement of learning nor for immediate gain: they are valued in themselves because they arouse curiosity and stimulate delight; and because their knowledge or collection guarantees a social reputation. (Houghton, "Virtuoso 1" 56)

Thus utility, and historical and scientific value, while sometimes important to the virtuoso, 'was subordinate to personal incentives' (Houghton, "Virtuoso 1" 56–7). By this definition, the Dwarf Man in *Prelude* Book 5 below *can* be classed as a virtuoso, despite his pretensions to utility, because the text asserts his motivating principle is 'Vanity' (W. Wordsworth, 1805 *Prel* v. 354).<sup>12</sup> Wordsworth, despite staking his financial hopes on the success of his brother John's employment with the East India Company, generally aligns himself against utility and commerce in texts written from 1793–1805. Based on tone and sensibility, the Dwarf Man virtuoso satirised in *Prelude* Book 5 is less a virtuoso than a diversified man of business; yet based on his accomplishments, reputation, and motives, he is the heir to the seventeenth-century dilettante virtuoso.

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upon trifles' (Addison and Steele No. 236, 12 October 1710).

- 12) Houghton makes the subtle distinction that 'the virtuoso is not at bottom a man whose wealth and leisure allow him to become a 'philosopher' (the case of Boyle). He is fundamentally a man for whom learning is the means to dispose of wealth and leisure in the happiest fashion—and with the comforting assurance that he may also be serving the desiderants of philosophy, history, or art. *The study of virtuosity is therefore a study in sensibility*. We have to trace historically the origin, growth, and decline of a subjective approach to learning; which means that the ultimate clue is often the *tone of voice*' (Houghton, "Virtuoso 1" 57 my emphasis).

The second part of Houghton's study concludes with the important reflection that satires against virtuosos in the seventeenth century depended upon the existence of extreme cases, and that 'the solid intellectual core [of virtuosity]... tended to be overlooked' (Houghton, "Virtuoso 2" 214). This point supports Bredekamp's analysis of the productive links between sixteenth- and seventeenth-century collectors, their *Kunstkammer*, and the rise of natural philosophy. Although a Society of Virtuosity was founded in 1689, the figure of the respectable virtuoso was already in decline by 1700 (Cust 6–7, in Houghton 214). Satires against learning damaged the successful amateur scholars along with the lunatic fringe.<sup>13</sup> Houghton praises the movement as a whole for its role in 'disseminating... Renaissance culture among the aristocracy, and [transforming] the "degenerous gentleman" of the Tudors, with his passion for hawks and his contempt for knowledge, into the educated Cavalier' (Houghton, "Virtuoso 2" 214).

A century later, the opinions on virtuosos and polymaths expressed in Wordsworth's texts reflect a confusion of sentiments: the optimistic Baroque movement, the satires against it, and an eighteenth-century counter-movement against anti-intellectualism. As Houghton concludes, satire contributed less to the death of seventeenth-century virtuosity than its own success did. By 1667 Sprat attested that '*Trafic and Commerce* have given Mankind a higher Degree than any Title of *Nobility*, even that of *Civility* and *Humanity* itself' (Sprat 408, in Houghton "Virtuoso 2", 215).

Similarly, Locke's *Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) concerns itself not with the gentleman of leisure, but with 'what ought to be the proper Study of a... Man of Business in the World' (Locke, *Education* §172, p.217). Locke's treatise grudgingly accepts the usefulness of Newton's *Principia* (§182), along with arithmetic, geography, chronology, and history (§168–

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13) For example, Sir William Temple writes that 'the Learned began to fear the same Fate [as the Pedants], and that the Pidgeons should be taken for Daws, because they were all in a Flock: And because the poorest and meanest of the Company were proud, the best and the richest began to be ashamed' (Temple 70).



§173), though it seems indifferent to natural philosophy (§181); it suggests that a little Euclid provides more than enough geometry (§171).<sup>14)</sup> Locke reviles poetry as a pastime and profession, and declares 'I am not for *Painting*', on the grounds that it is a sedentary activity, and too difficult to learn well (Locke, *Education* §165, pp.206–9; §191, pp.243–4).<sup>15)</sup>

Baroque philosophy and experiment had produced a wealth of direct applications to commerce and war. Locke's treatise on education aims to solidify these gains by modernizing the aristocratically 'disgraceful Names of *Mechanick* and *Trade*' (Locke, *Education* 250). Philosophy, arts, and literature—all are necessary sacrifices to a practical age. Sprat anticipates that in the modern world, 'whither the greatest *Trade* shall constantly flow, the greatest *Riches* and *Power* will be establish'd' and observed that other European powers were already 'bent upon the advancing of *Commerce*, as the best means... to enlarge their *Empire*' (Sprat 408).

The early eighteenth century reaped the fruits of this utilitarian narrowing (a decline relevant to the debate on liberal arts education in the early twenty-first century). Authors well known to Wordsworth, including Shaftesbury and Swift, commented on the 'fashionable flight from learning' (Houghton, "Virtuoso 2" 216). Even Shadwell, whose satire *The Virtuoso* had fired one of the loudest salvos against curiosity without utility, warned of the consequences of the unilateral victory of commerce and gallantry. As Houghton points out, Shadwell reserves his greatest criticism in the play for the gallants, who 'laugh at any Gentleman that has Art or Science' (Houghton, "Virtuoso 2" 217). Longvil and Bruce, the sensible young gentlemen of the play, open Act 1 by lamenting the

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14) Locke writes, 'the first six books of *Euclid* [are] enough for him to be taught. For I am in some doubt, whether more to a Man of Business, be necessary or useful' (Locke, *Education* §171, p.216).

15) 'if [a child] has no *Genius* to *Poetry*, 'tis the most unreasonable thing in the World, to torment a Child, and waste his time about that which can never succeed: And if he have a Poetick Vein, 'tis to me the strangest thing in the World, that the Father should desire, or suffer it to be cherished, or improved' (Locke, *Education* §165, p.207).

foolishness of their own class and generation.<sup>16)</sup> Longvil jokes that

if they go on as they begin, the Gentlemen of the next Age will scarce have Learning enough to claim the benefit of the Clergy for Man-slaughter. (Shadwell 3)

Authors known and loved by Wordsworth, including Swift and Shaftesbury, drew attention to this crisis of education in the first decades of the eighteenth century. In the *Characteristicks*—which Wordsworth had likely read from by 1785, during his school days—Shaftesbury laments the poor choice facing youth, between ‘*Pedantry and School-Learning*’ on the one hand, ‘which lies amidst the Dregs and most corrupt parts of antient Literature’, and on the other hand, ‘the *fashionable illiterate World*’ (Houghton, “Virtuoso 2” 216–7; Cooper I, part 3, 333–4n).<sup>17)</sup> Negotiation between these two unenviable paths influences Wordsworth’s representation of the Dwarf Man virtuoso in *Prelude* Book 5 below.

### Literary and Biographical Contexts

Unlike friends and colleagues such as Francis Wrangham, Southey, Coleridge, and Walter Scott, Wordsworth lacked the time, the financial means, and the stable living situation that would have allowed him to amass a collection of books or curiosities. Yet Wordsworth remained a ‘collector’ of curiosities and antiquities (including objects and ideas from

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16) ‘*Longv[il]. Lucretius! Divine Lucretius: But my Noble Epicurean, what an Unfashionable Fellow art thou, that in this Age, art given to understand Latine? | Bruce. ‘Tis true, Longvil, I am a Bold Fellow to pretend to it, when ‘tis accounted Pedantry for a Gentleman to spell, and where the Race of Gentlemen is more degenerate than that of Horses*’ (Shadwell 2).

17) Shaftesbury professes, ‘I am persuaded that to be a *Virtuoso* (so far as befits a Gentleman) is a higher step towards the becoming a Man of Virtue and Good Sense, than the being what in this Age we call a *Scholar*. For even rude Nature it-self, in its primitive Simplicity, is a better Guide to Judgment, than improv’d Sophistry, and pedantick Learning’ (Cooper I, part 3, 333–4). This passage likely influenced the formation of Wordsworth’s definitions of, and judgment of, the terms ‘*virtuoso*’ and ‘*scholar*’.

what we would now class as anthropology, archaeology, ethnology, natural history, folklore and mythology, and the natural sciences), throughout his life, through the medium of his poetry. In addition to mentioning antiquities and curiosities themselves in his poems, he also makes several metaphorical references to the 'cabinet'—specifically meaning the *Kunstkammer* or *Wunderkammer*—in his poetry.

Wordsworth uses the metaphor of the collector's cabinet twice in *The Prelude*. Firstly, in the second part of the two-part *Prelude* of 1799, he uses the analogy of the cabinet to question the appropriate methods of analysis of the history of his own mind. He concludes that modern philosophical (scientific) methods are insufficient 'to analyse a soul'. This passage becomes a part of Book 2 of the 1805 *Prelude* (ii. 203-37). Secondly, Book 3 of the 1805 *Prelude* concludes with a summary of Wordsworth's Cambridge education using the analogy of the cabinet as the field of knowledge through which he roved, experiencing and feeling much but retaining perhaps little (iii. 644-68).

All of *The Prelude*'s references to cabinets and museums are metaphorical. When Wordsworth uses the image of the 'cabinet' and 'museum' in *The Prelude*, what did he have in mind? Did he base these images on any cabinets and museums that he had actually seen, or did his imagination depend on descriptions and prints in books? The history of the *Kunstkammer* and the virtuoso stretches over two and a half centuries before Wordsworth's birth, and the ambiguity of the term makes it all the more relevant to Wordsworth's conflicting feelings about scholasticism and science.

As Houghton demonstrates, the seventeenth-century term 'virtuoso' could apply equally to antiquaries; art collectors; amateur naturalists and geologists; and proponents of the New Science at the Royal Society, such as Boyle and Hooker (Houghton, 'Virtuoso Part 1' 52). Similarly, as Bredekamp convincingly suggests, the *Kunstkammer*'s blending of natural and antiquarian objects with the latest machines and tools reflected the interests of collectors, meaning that the virtuoso would not identify themselves solely as an antiquary or natural philosopher. The cabinet, the

collector, the antiquary, and the virtuoso occupied a rapidly shifting ground that changed the focus of study solely from scholastic fields such as divinity, literature, antiquities, and metaphysics, towards experimental philosophy in the middle decades of the seventeenth century (Houghton, "Virtuoso 1" 72–3).<sup>18)</sup>

### Cabinets in Literature: Wordsworth's Literary Context

The rapidly multiplying concepts applied to terms such as 'cabinet', 'antiquary', and 'virtuoso' over the course of the seventeenth century produces confusion during the decline in their popularity over the eighteenth century. Even if Wordsworth saw no cabinets of curiosities or museums in person before he finished the 1805 *Prelude*, he would have read these terms in poetry and prose. While the cabinet itself remained generally the same—the *Kunstammer* or *Wunderkammer*, a miscellany of rare and curious objects from natural history, antiquity, and natural philosophy—the proportion and focus of different kinds of objects in any real or imagined cabinet would vary widely between 1600 and 1800, and so would the epistemological implications attached to them.

Images of cabinets of curiosities appear in the Wordsworthian milieu from 1790–1805 in texts by authors including George Dyer (1700?–1758), Henry Jones (1721–1770), Horace Smith (1779–1849), and Samuel Rogers (1763–1855). Dyer's *The Fleece*—a poem likely well known to Wordsworth since his schooldays—uses an image of African seashells destined to be acquired 'For Pond's rich cabinet, or Sloan's': references to painter and antiquary Arthur Pond (bap.1701–1758) and collector Sir Hans Sloane (1660–1753).<sup>19)</sup> Like Dyer, Jones' *Isle of Wight* uses the metaphor of nature

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18) Thus: 'The range of interest precludes any definition of virtuosity based on subject matter. All we can say is that painting, antiquities, and science are the major concerns...' (Houghton, "Virtuoso Part 1", 53).

19) 'At solemn distances its pillars rise, | Sofal's blue rocks, Mozambic's palmy steeps, | And lofty Madagascar's glittering shores, | Where various woods of beauteous vein and hue, | And glossy shells in elegance of form, | For Pond's rich cabinet, or Sloan's, are found' (Dyer iv. 260–5). Though Wordsworth does not refer to the poem by name until 1811, Wu suggests that he 'must have

as a cabinet stored with treasures to satisfy both utility and fancy.<sup>20)</sup> Smith's epistolary 'To a Lady' is a thank-you note for a 'little God of Love | Dug from Pompeii', and envisions a Roman cabinet of antiquities and ancient learning; the poet imagines that the original owner's mansion might have displayed 'The choicest stores of classic taste' while 'her rich cabinets outpour'd | A constant feast of Intellect' (Smith 208–10, ll.12, 15–16).

Furthermore, two important images from Coleridge's work resonate with the cabinet and museum metaphors of *The Prelude*. Firstly, though assembled long after the *Prelude*, Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* (1817) uses the word 'museum' as the equivalent of a holy place or sanctuary, in the context of sincere versus petty literary criticism.<sup>21)</sup> Secondly, in an important connection between Wordsworth and the influences of sympathetic Enlightenment thinkers, Coleridge effuses on the character of Sir Thomas Browne in one of his few surviving letters to Sara Hutchinson on 10 March 1804. Coleridge describes Browne as 'a feeling heart conjoined with a mind of active curiosity,' and adds,

Fond of the Curious, and a Hunter of Oddities & Strangenesses, while he conceived himself with quaint & humourous Gravity a useful inquirer into physical Truth & fundamental Science, he loved to contemplate & discuss his own Thoughts & Feelings, because he

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known this poem since his schooldays' (Wu, *WR 1800-1815* 83).

- 20) 'The world shall find thee and with wonder tell, | That Vecta's shining scenes the world excel; | Thou precious cabinet where nature locks, | Her richest gems within thy beauteous rocks; | Thou casket fill'd with all her choicest store, | Of matter freely, but of fancy more...' (Jones ll.172–7).
- 21) The vindictive critic 'ceases to be a CRITIC, and takes on him the most contemptible character to which a rational creature can be degraded, that of a gossip, backbiter, and pasquillant: but with this heavy aggravation, that he steals the unquiet, the deforming passions of the World into the Museum; into the very place which, next to the chapel and oratory, should be our sanctuary, and secure place of refuge; offers abominations on the altar of the muses; and makes its sacred paling the very circle in which he conjures up the lying and profane spirit' (ii.xxi.119).

found by comparison with other men's that *they* too were *curiosities*:  
& so with a perfectly graceful & interesting Ease he put *them* too into  
his Musaeum and Cabinet of Rarities—. (Griggs ii. 1081)

Considering that Coleridge was an active bibliographic antiquary, both of these references are not only metaphorical, but strong in human feeling. Neither uses images of the cabinet of curiosities or museum in the overtly critical way that appears in *The Prelude*.

### Cabinets and Museums: The British Museum

Beyond his reading, Wordsworth perhaps had little access to actual cabinets, museums, and collections of curiosities before 1805. During his brief residence in London in 1790 and during other early visits, he may have seen cabinets or collections of 'curiosities' or 'wonders' on display as popular exhibitions (Altick). The tourist's itinerary of London from *Prelude* Book 7 does not mention the British Museum, but Wordsworth may have visited Montagu House, the original building on the museum's current site in Russell Square. If he had, he would have found it an uninspiring and claustrophobic experience, very much in line with his description of the 'Cabinet | Or wide Museum' of his analogy in Book 3. The museum's holdings were growing rapidly along with the British Empire, and even by the mid-eighteenth century, Montagu House had become inadequate to store and display the collections. Wordsworth could have seen the museum's natural history collections if he visited the British Museum in 1790, although no evidence suggests he did. The regular open access to the public described in 1814 was nothing like the shambles of admission by ticketed tour from the 1770s to 1805 (*Synopsis* xxxii–xxxiii; Shelley 57–62).<sup>22)</sup>

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22) We must not imagine the accessibility of the British Museum to Wordsworth by current or even Victorian standards. According to an early twentieth century summary of the museum's history, in the late eighteenth century, 'Admission to the galleries of antiquities and natural history was at first by ticket only on application in writing, and limited to ten persons, for each of three hours in the day. Visitors were not allowed to inspect the cases at their leisure, but were conducted through the galleries by officers of the house. The hours of

### Texts: the two *Prelude* cabinets

With the theoretical, historical, biographical, and literary contexts in mind, let us turn to the two passages from *The Prelude*. In the first example, Wordsworth uses the analogy of the 'cabinet of curiosities' in order to critique classification, and praise Coleridge as one to whom 'The unity of all has been revealed'. He writes, probably in mid-to-late 1799:

But who shall parcel out  
His intellect by geometric rules,  
Split like a province into round and square;  
Who knows the individual hour in which  
His habits were first sowed, even as a seed;  
Who that shall point as with a wand and say,  
This portion of the river of my mind  
Came from yon fountain? Thou, my Friend, art one  
More deeply read in thy own thoughts, no slave  
Of that false secondary power by which  
In weakness we create distinctions, then  
Believe our puny boundaries are things  
Which we perceive and not which we have made.  
To thee, unblinded by these outward shews,  
The unity of all has been revealed,  
And thou wilt doubt with me, less aptly skilled  
Than many are to class the cabinet  
Of their sensations and in voluble phrase  
Run through the history and birth of each  
As of a single independent thing. (Parrish ii. 242–61)

Here Wordsworth praises Coleridge's self-knowledge (using a metaphor

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admission were subsequently extended; but it was not until the year 1810 that the Museum was freely accessible to the general public for three days in the week, from ten to four o'clock' (*A General Guide to the British Museum (Natural History)* 102).

of books), and follows his example to 'doubt' that his 'sensations' (described a few lines later as both his 'general habits and desires' and 'each most obvious and particular thought') can be classed as 'independent' objects in a metaphorical cabinet of curiosities.

If Wordsworth's objective in the nascent *Prelude* is recollection leading to self-knowledge, then this passage argues that the methodology of the collector—whether virtuoso, antiquary, or natural philosopher—is insufficient to describe the human 'mind' or 'soul'. Wordsworth's analogy contradicts the seventeenth-century idea of the collector as a natural philosopher seeking to recover Edenic knowledge (as in Johann Daniel Major), or the rational man collecting 'Pictures' to fill a dark cabinet (as in Locke's *Essay*).<sup>23</sup> The 1799 text implies that experience can be collected, but not classified. Analysis of the soul, while perhaps possible, is a 'Hard task'; contrary to Descartes and Locke, the *Prelude* makes clear that such analysis cannot depend on the 'false secondary power' by which scholars and philosophers alike 'create distinctions'.

In the 1805 *Prelude*, the passage from 1799 remains in Book 2, and makes the same general argument. However, Wordsworth strengthens the language of part of the passage, explicitly naming the object of the text's critique as 'Science':

Thou, my Friend! art one  
More deeply read in thy own thoughts; to thee  
Science appears but, what in truth she is,  
Not as our glory and our absolute boast,  
But as a succedaneum, and a prop  
To our infirmity. Thou art no slave

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23) Bredekamp argues that from the sixteenth century, books on mechanics had nurtured the belief that humankind could return to its state of Edenic perfection, by impressing the right kinds of knowledge onto the *tabula rasa* of the post-Fall mind: 'The *Kunstammer* became a metaphor for the human brain gradually reacquiring Edenic wisdom' (Bredekamp 40–1).



Of that false secondary power... (1805 *Prel* ii. 215–221)<sup>24)</sup>

Though raised in the empirical tradition of Enlightenment thought—reading and studying Euclid, Bacon, Locke, and hearing parts of Descartes from Coleridge<sup>25)</sup>—Wordsworth here resists a central effect of empirical classifying systems, the ‘distinctions’ and ‘puny boundaries’ of perception. Foucault’s argument aligns with the *Prelude*’s here in the acknowledgment that these boundaries were ‘made’ during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, through shifts in representation, rather than instinctively perceived.

In both the 1799 *Prelude* and 1805 *Prelude* versions of this passage, the metaphorical *Kunstkammer* represents, on Willey’s dialectic, naturalism rather than scholasticism. Yet by describing ‘the cabinet | Of... sensations’ as a *Kunstkammer* rather than a museum classified by the system of a Buffon or a Linnaeus, the text ironically conflates excessive empiricism with the scholasticism of the antiquary and the anti-Baconian virtuoso—the Gimcrack devoted to curiosity as an end in itself. Wordsworth’s cabinet in Book 2, like the idea of the *Kunstkammer* itself, serves as an unstable symbol that takes on an epistemological role imposed by its subjective observer. In the early nineteenth century, the virtuoso’s cabinet draws criticism from the *Prelude* for the same reason it drew praise in the

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24) Wordsworth’s use of ‘succadaneum’ (a substitute) is interesting, both as a modern Latin ‘scientific’ term, and for the fact that during the eighteenth century the term could be misused to mean ‘A remedy, cure’, or ‘A drug, frequently of inferior efficacy, substituted for another’ (*OED*, definitions 3 and 2). These latter definitions are equivalent to ‘a prop | To our infirmity’, which would make the whole expression a hendiadys. This reading offers a different meaning from the idea that ‘Science’ serves as a direct ‘substitute’ for ‘our glory and our absolute boast’—other concepts that might include, for W in 1805, direct experience, nature, human faith, etc. Apart from hearing the term in conversation with Coleridge or others, W might have seen it in Goldsmith’s *History of the Earth*, cited in the *OED* (Goldsmith i. 238).

25) W’s copied quotations from Descartes, dating from *ca.* February 1801, ‘do not imply serious study of Descartes by W’ but influenced the Arab Quixote passage in *Prelude* Book 5 (Wu, *WR 1800-1815* 74; Abrams, Wordsworth, and Gill 158n4). See also (J. Wordsworth 194).

seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: as an inspiration to mechanistic philosophy.<sup>26)</sup> This is the diametric reason for which it was criticised in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries: as a site of temporal and spatial confusion; unhistoricized natural history; and curiosity over utility.

Let us juxtapose this first analogy of the collector's cabinet against the second. At the end of Book 3 of the *1805 Prelude*, Wordsworth summarises his retrospective on his Cambridge education by using another metaphor of the collector's cabinet or early museum. He writes:

Carelessly  
 I gaz'd, roving as through a Cabinet  
 Or wide Museum (throng'd with fishes, gems,  
 Birds, crocodiles, shells) where little can be seen  
 Well understood, or naturally endear'd,  
 Yet still does every step bring something forth  
 That quickens, pleases, stings; and here and there  
 A casual rarity is singled out,  
 And has its brief perusal, then gives way  
 To others, all supplanted in their turn.  
 Meanwhile, amid this gaudy Congress, framed  
 Of things, by nature, most unneighbourly,  
 The head turns round, and cannot right itself;  
 And, though an aching and a barren sense  
 Of gay confusion still be uppermost,  
 With few wise longings and but little love,

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26) In his festive *Gesta Grayorum* (1594), Francis Bacon enumerates the four essential resources for the study of philosophy. The first and second are a library, and a botanical and zoological garden. The third is 'a goodly huge cabinet, wherein whatsoever the hand of man by exquisite art or engine hath made rare in stuff, form, or motion; whatsoever singularity, chance, and the shuffle of things has produced; whatsoever nature hath wrought in things that want life and may be kept, shall be sorted and included....' The fourth is a 'still-house, so furnished with mills, instruments, furnaces, and vessels as may be a palace fit for a philosopher's stone...' (Bacon viii. 334–5).

Yet something to the memory sticks at last,  
 Whence profit may be drawn in times to come. (1805 *Prel* iii. 649–69)

In these lines Wordsworth writes of his education as he writes of his childhood reading in Book 5: as a source of 'delight', pursued 'Carelessly' as a person walking through a 'Cabinet | Or wide Museum'.

The varied objects in this cabinet produce a range of emotional responses, all ephemeral. The cabinet, like the associating human mind, or the poetic metaphor, juxtaposes objects that would not normally relate to each other in a 'real' or 'natural' environment; the cabinet is an artificial space, 'framed | Of things, by nature, most unneighbourly' (1805 *Prel* iii. 662–3). The text describes Wordsworth's education using the metaphor of the *Kunstkammer*; the reader's experience of this metaphor resembles poetry or metaphor itself—that is, the cabinet is a concept or sign that links unfamiliar things by spatial juxtaposition, as metaphor links unrelated things through linguistic juxtaposition.

But what kind of philosophical methodology, or what kind of epistemology, does this second cabinet or museum represent? Again, the image is unstable. Compared to the metaphorical 'cabinet | Of sensations' in Book 2, this cabinet or museum is clearly a virtuoso's cabinet or heterogeneous seventeenth- or eighteenth-century *Kunstkammer*, rather than a modern museum subdivided by field, with rigorously classified exhibits—as the Ashmolean and the British Museum were slowly, but gradually, becoming. Wordsworth's description sounds remarkably like the experience of a visit to the British Museum in 1790, with ticket-holders rushed through a dazzling array of 'unneighbourly' exhibit cases, with little or no explanation, a place 'where little can be seen | Well understood'.

A simple reading of this passage would state that the text recounts the experience of viewing a *Kunstkammer* or museum through early-to-mid-eighteenth century sensibility. The cabinet or museum in this passage is not outdated—in the sense that Wordsworth describes a collection of the sort that existed in 1790 or 1803–5 in Cambridge, Oxford, London, and

elsewhere. The cabinet of Book 3 is the stereotypical cabinet of Shadwell's *Virtuoso* and subsequent satires against pedantry that dominated the eighteenth century. It accurately describes the confused state of exhibits and museums around 1790–1805.

However, in the context of the cabinet metaphor in Book 2, the cabinet or museum in Book 3 seems unusual *because* it is not outdated. Book 3 faintly praises the dusty eighteenth-century cabinet for its failings, whereas Book 2 condemns the seventeenth-century cabinet for its successes. In Book 2 Wordsworth looks further back, to what Houghton calls the golden age of the virtuoso, and the period during which the *Kunstammer's* conflation of time and space—according to Bredekamp—inspired the development of historicity and methodology, rather than unfocused curiosity and 'a barren sense | Of gay confusion' (Bredekamp 37–45). In Book 3, the *Kunstammer* of Wordsworth's Cambridge education stands in the text as a gentle, wry testament to scholasticism (at best), or pedantry (at worst)—the pedantry Shaftesbury warns of in 1711. Wordsworth's Cambridge education inspires 'few wise longings and but little love,' but an experience from which 'something to the memory sticks at last, | Whence profit may be drawn in times to come'. As a young reader of Shaftesbury, Wordsworth is not now defending the path of pedantry, but remains frankly representing the confusion of English university education during the rapid transition from scholasticism to naturalism, from Aristotle and Aquinas to Bacon and Newton.

Thus the *Kunstammer* of *Prelude* Books 2 and 3, taken together, show a historical sleight-of-hand at work, a conflation worthy of the *Kunstammer* itself. Returning to *Prelude* composition in early 1804 after a break of more than three years, Wordsworth destabilises the symbolic meaning of the cabinet between Books 2 and 3. The simple reading of Book 3 sketched above is insufficient, because the 'cabinet | Of sensations' passage in Book 2 clearly demonstrates that in 1799 Wordsworth associated the cabinet with the flexible experimental philosophy of Bacon and the empiricism of Locke, even if he did not have direct experience of the work of Descartes,

Tournefort, Linnaeus, Buffon, etc.<sup>27</sup>) By early March 1804 reflecting on his Cambridge experience, Wordsworth feels more affection for classical learning and Cambridge's scholasticism than he did in 1789; or at least the text expresses this affection, particularly in one long effusion before the image of the cabinet that closes the book (1805 *Prel* iii. 459–91). The *Kunstkammer* thus becomes the spatially and historically heterogeneous collection of the amateur virtuoso, and the text finds the confidence to locate some value in its disarray and 'gaudy Congress'.

### **Virtuosos, Nature, and Fancy: the Arab-Quixote and the Dwarf Man in *Prelude* Book 5**

In contrast to the examples of cabinets in Books 2 and 3, *Prelude* Book 5 explicitly expresses Wordsworth's epistemological goal, as the text explores the relationships between literature and lore, science (in the sense of all learning, both scholastic and naturalistic), human life, and nature. In Book 5, Wordsworth wishes, on behalf of a future 'race of real children', for 'Knowledge not purchased with the loss of power' (1805 *Prel* v. 449). Book 5 of the 1805 *Prelude* makes a useful case study for the thesis that Wordsworth's images of cabinets, collecting, virtuosity, and related forms of intellectual enquiry provide important insights into his development and self-conception as a poet. The readings below argue that the two contrasting examples of unusual virtuosos in Book 5 show the text's refusal to reject scientific naturalism outright, but to weigh it equally with poetry, playful experience of nature, and the materials of fantasy or fancy.

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27) Wordsworth does not appear to have known the Lichfield Botanical Society's translations of Linnaeus (the society was established by Erasmus Darwin for this purpose): *A System of Vegetables* (1783–5) and *The Families of Plants* (1787). However, he knew Erasmus Darwin's verse epics, *The Loves of the Plants* (1789) and *The Economy of Vegetation* (1792)—which popularized the Linnaean system—alluding to them in his early publications *An Evening Walk* and *Descriptive Sketches* (1793) (Wu, *WR* 1770–1799 44; Darwin). W would possibly also have been exposed to Linnaean botany through reading Cook's voyages; Daniel Solander (1733–82), Linnaeus' student, accompanied Cook and Joseph Banks on the *Endeavour* voyage (1768–71) (Wu, *WR* 1800–1815 62; Hawkesworth).

Book 5, subtitled 'Books', contains some of the least book-ish episodes or 'spots of time' of *The Prelude*, including the Boy of Winander passage and the Drowned Man of Esthwaite. Yet it also contains two passages strongly connected to the idea of curiosities and miscellany; the collecting and preservation of different types of knowledge; and declining and emerging types of knowledge or epistemes. The first of these is the well-known dream of the Arab Rider or Arab-Quixote (1805 *Prel* v. 49–165). This paper reads the Arab-Quixote as a conflated Orientalist and Western antiquary, attempting to preserve the most important knowledge inscribed on the post-Fall *tabula rasa*—mathematics and poetry—from destruction by a cataclysmic flood.

The second passage, less frequently discussed, serves as parodic complement to the Arab Rider: Wordsworth's portrait of the early-nineteenth-century virtuoso and 'Man of Business' (to use Locke's term above) as a 'dwarf Man', a 'monster birth | Engendered by these too industrious times' (1805 *Prel* v. 295, 292–3). This paper will conclude by comparing these two passages and asking: in the context of the *Prelude*'s arguments on tensions between scholasticism and naturalism—and specifically on the *Kunstammer*'s and the virtuoso's role in the classification, organisation, and preservation of knowledge—how are these two fantastical portraits related?

The dreaming Wordsworth (or Coleridge) encounters the Arab-Quixote carrying the treasures of a shell and a stone, symbolic of poetic and mathematical knowledge, to bury them for safekeeping against a cataclysmic flood. Critics have offered a number of reasons why the shell makes an apt dream-image for poetry, such as the way its spiral form (assuming that it is the sort of shell you can listen to, as the dreaming Coleridge does) relates to Wordsworth's narrative style, as a 'labyrinth of narrative repetition'; or how the shell is a metaphor for the idea of the poetic image itself—images as 'the shells of things' that must 're-originate their value repetitively' (Miller 67, 95–9; Liu 351). But in the context of the *Kunstammer* and the virtuoso, the shell is simultaneously an object from natural history (a seashell) and an artificial, possibly antiquarian object (a

book of poetry). Both of these classes of objects appear together in the collector's cabinet, uncategorised by field of knowledge or point of historical origin. In Coleridge's dream, they fuse into a single symbol.

In this way the Arab-Quixote resembles the seventeenth- or eighteenth-century virtuoso, equally devoted to poetry and natural philosophy. Both halves of the Arab-Quixote's character relate to the work of the *Kunstkammer* and the virtuoso. Cervantes' hero served as a preeminent example of the satirised antiquary, the amateur scholar of chivalry out of place in the modern world (and gradually out of his own mind) (Cervantes).<sup>28)</sup> As an avid reader of Akenside, Wordsworth may have known that poet's short poem *The Virtuoso* (which appeared two years after Wordsworth completed the *1805 Prelude*), which specifically makes this association. The poem concludes by warning:

The wight [the Virtuoso] whose brain this phantom's power [Phantasy's]  
doth fill,  
On whom she doth with constant care attend,  
Will for a dreadful giant take a mill,  
Or a grand palace in a hogsty find:  
(From her dire influence me may Heaven defend!)  
All things with vitiated sight he spies:  
Neglects his family, forgets his friend,  
Seeks painted trifles and fantastic toys,  
And eagerly pursues imaginary joys. (Akenside 237–9, ll.82–90)

Thus if we look at the Arab-Quixote from the perspective of collecting and virtuosity, the mysterious rider not only counts as something of a virtuoso (from his devotion to both arts and sciences) but also as a kind of mad collector or hoarder.

Considering the dream image has been twice appropriated (from

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28) Wordsworth's copy of Cervantes, avidly read since childhood, was probably the 1782 four-volume translation by Smollett (Wu, *WR 1770-1799* 26).

Descartes by Coleridge, and from Coleridge by Wordsworth) this particular fantastical collector particularly suits the ambiguous epistemes and aesthetics of the *1805 Prelude*. Firstly, Cervantes' Quixote is not a collecting antiquary after the first pages of the novel, but an antiquary who enters into the world *as if it were* his collection. Like Wordsworth's *persona* in Book 5, Quixote values fantasy—he just fails to define why he does so, as Wordsworth struggles to do. Even though he does not collect objects, Quixote is brought down by the weight of his accumulated chivalric texts on his mind: the imbalance between text and world.

Secondly, the Arab rider seems to be a Bedouin nomad. The Bedouin, from the European chivalric perspective, epitomised 'travelling light'; the dream-Bedouin has concentrated the essential post-Fall knowledge into a stone and a shell, and carries them along with his lance—just three objects. I would suggest therefore that, from the perspective of the *Kunstkammer* and the virtuoso, the Arab-Quixote makes an ideal character for Wordsworth: a traveller capable of preserving and transmitting large quantities of culture and knowledge, while remaining highly mobile, and transient between geographies and cultures.

Finally, in this passage we can see the first connection between this odd collector and the other major passages in Book 5. The symbol of the 'Shell | Of a surpassing brightness' literally relates to the 'deluge now at hand' that approaches with its 'glittering light' (*1805 Prel* v. 80–1, 99, 129). Poetic prophecy heralds apocalypse, and this motif (seashell and sea) connects this episode to the Boy of Winander and the drowned man of Esthwaite through the images of water and sound.

The motif of sound and orality has a strong presence in Book 5. In the context of the argument of this paper, this sound imagery contrasts with the self-limiting, visual frame of reference of the modern classification system, as described by Foucault above (Foucault, *Order of Things* 144–5). Furthermore, in Foucault's theories of history, the Arab-Quixote exemplifies a danger we can identify throughout *The Prelude*, namely the dream of futurity, of closure—the difference between a particular, unidentified book of poems with all its shortcomings and errors (a book



tethered to particular history by its *Litteraria*), and 'A loud prophetic blast of harmony' in 'an unknown Tongue': the abstract notion of poetry itself, the *logos* (1805 *Prel* v. 96, 94). The former, 'real' object can serve as 'effective history', while the latter cannot.

Finally, let us consider the second virtuoso in *Prelude* Book 5. The subsequent portrait of what the 'virtuoso' has become in the late eighteenth century—natural philosopher, dilettante, moralist, and man of commerce—produces a complex response to the 'Arab Phantom' and 'Semi-Quixote'. Wordsworth describes the Arab-Quixote in the language of the melancholy seventeenth-century virtuoso: the collector, natural philosopher, or antiquary whom curiosity or reason—the quest for knowledge or Baconian 'rule'—has led astray. The voice of Wordsworth in Book 5 admits that he has

felt

A reverence for a Being thus employed,  
And thought that in the blind and awful lair  
Of such a madness, reason did lie couched. (1805 *Prel* v. 149–52)

In other words, Wordsworth finds method in the madness of the dilettante virtuoso who takes, as his ultimate goal, the preservation of knowledge for its own sake.

On the one hand, in Foucault's terms, we might read this as Book 5 advocating a kind of genealogy—the preservation of the history of human work with all its errors and digressions, its accumulated *Litteraria*. On the other hand, as described above, while the dream-stone represents a particular book (Euclid's *Elements*), the dream-shell represents poetry in the abstract—a kind of history and literature antithetical to the collecting methodologies of the *Kunstkammer* as Bredekamp describes.

In contrast, the portrait that follows represents a caricature of the waking world, the character of a late-eighteenth-century intellectual. The text comes to this portrait with hesitant language, and after a number of digressions—including returning to the question of whether Wordsworth

has chosen the right subject for his epic, instead of a more fanciful subject, 'some tale | That did bewitch me then, and soothes me now' (1805 *Prel* v. 178–9).

Finally, the text begins, in a confessional tone:

My drift hath scarcely,  
I fear, been obvious; for I have recoiled  
From showing as it is the monster birth  
Engendered by these too industrious times.  
Let few words paint it: 'tis a Child, no Child,  
But a dwarf Man; in knowledge, virtue, skill;  
In what he is not, and in what he is,  
The noontide shadow of a man complete... (1805 *Prel* v. 290–8)

Here immediately we see that the text includes the word 'virtue', in the Dwarf Man's stunted or incomplete 'knowledge, virtue, skill'; in this context, the word ambiguously represents both human virtue (as in ethics) and the *virtu* of the virtuoso, that is, an understanding of historical, scientific, and aesthetic worth and rarity.

Wordsworth addresses the Dwarf Man's attitudes to fear, with a direct reference to the dream of the Arab-Quixote:

He is fenced round, nay armed, for aught we know  
In panoply complete; and fear itself,  
Natural or supernatural alike,  
Unless it leap upon him in a dream,  
Touches him not. (1805 *Prelude*, v. 314–8)

Using the classical or chivalric word 'panoply', the text indicates that, metaphorically, the Dwarf Man wears full armour: a Greek hoplite or crusading knight, in contrast to the robes of the Arab-Quixote.

After satirising the moral perfection of this product of the Enlightenment, Wordsworth turns to the Dwarf Man's knowledge and

reading:

in learning and in books  
 He is a prodigy. His discourse moves slow,  
 Massy and ponderous as a prison door,  
 Tremendously embossed with terms of art;  
 Rank growth of propositions overruns  
 The Stripling's brain; the path in which he treads  
 Is choked with grammars; cushion of Divine  
 Was never such a type of thought profound  
 As is the pillow where he rests his head. (1805 *Prel* v. 319–27)

In a move that Willey and Houghton would identify with Locke, and Foucault with the Baroque shift in representation from words to things, here poetry has descended to 'discourse'. The mouth of the Arab-Quixote's shell has become the mouth of a prison, sealed by the language of the listener; the rider's rapid passage 'o'er the Desart Sands' (assumed to be rapid, if it can outrun the 'fleet waters of the drowning world') becomes a path 'choked with grammars'. Not only does the symbolic shape of knowledge shift from nature (desert, stone, and shell) to town or ruin (prison, embossed door, weed-choked path), but the site of the encounter with knowledge shifts from nature to society. Even the waking-world site of dreams shifts: the chamber of the philosopher or 'Divine' takes the place of Coleridge's 'rocky cave | By the sea-side' (1805 *Prel* v. 325, 57–8).

As the caricature continues, it becomes clear that Book 5 is making an argument with a solid understanding of the shift in the character of the virtuoso from the late seventeenth to the late eighteenth century, along the lines of growing focus on utility and 'business' as described by Houghton—and, perhaps as a consequence of almost two centuries of parody and satire. Book 5 portrays the utilitarian natural philosopher as a dilettante whose diverse knowledge belies a lack of understanding or 'common sense'. In this context, 'common sense' is a quality paradoxically rooted in materials of fancy, useless knowledge, and error: what Foucault

would classify as the materials of genealogy or 'effective' history.

At first glance, Wordsworth's Dwarf Man appears to celebrate the 'Romantic' virtuoso's diversity of knowledge, the very unity of natural philosophy and literature to which Wordsworth and Coleridge aspired for their epic poetry. As Wordsworth wrote to James Tobin on 6 March 1798:

I have written 1300 lines of a poem in which I contrive to convey most of the knowledge of which I am possessed. My object is to give pictures of Nature, Man, and Society. Indeed I know not any thing which will not come within the scope of my plan.

(De Selincourt and Shaver 212)

This wide-ranging curiosity, bordering on enthusiasm, and a Faust-like thirst for completeness of understanding—a trait that Wordsworth shares with Coleridge—thus seems to turn the 1804 satire of the Dwarf Man against Wordsworth and his own poetic project of 1798.

But Wordsworth is not satirising himself; rather, the text of Book 5 offers a coordinated criticism of 'emergent' history, as opposed to genealogy, as the narrator confronts how crucial aspects of his own mind formed out of digression, fantasy, fancy, and error. The 'moral part' of the Dwarf Man 'Is perfect', and he is immune to fear, except in dreams. These qualities lay the groundwork for the critique even as they draw praise from the text. Wordsworth describes the Dwarf Man's learning in the language of natural philosophy, commerce, colonialism, and voyages of discovery:

The Ensigns of the Empire which he holds,  
The globe and sceptre of his royalties,  
Are telescopes, and crucibles, and maps.  
Ships he can guide across the pathless sea,  
And tell you all their cunning; he can read  
The inside of the earth, and spell the stars;  
He knows the policies of foreign Lands;

Can string you names of districts, cities, towns,  
 The whole world over, tight as beads of dew  
 Upon a gossamer thread; he sifts, he weighs;  
 Takes nothing upon trust: his Teachers stare,  
 The Country People pray for God's good grace,  
 And tremble at his deep experiments. (1805 *Prel* v. 328–40)

Here the 'Empire' is knowledge of nature and society—but does not include any study proscribed by Locke's *Thoughts Concerning Education* (art, literature, moral philosophy). There is not even a mention of history, only geography. This is purely Willey's 'naturalism' rather than 'scholasticism', just as it is Foucault's visual grid that names ('spell the stars', 'Can string you names') by cutting off or ignoring all history before historicity. The 'Ensigns' or symbols of the Dwarf Man's authority are the tools of the natural and human sciences. His knowledge is Faustian in its completeness, though the term is inaccurate here, since the Dwarf Man scoffs at all fields that enticed Marlowe's Faust, all fields discarded by the triumph of naturalism: poetry, folklore, myth, art, music, and magic. These arts are the domain of superstition and fancy—the domains of error.

Read through Foucault, to which of the incompatible universes of pre- and post-Enlightenment epistemes does the Dwarf Man belong? Is he an Aristotelian or Cartesian virtuoso, focused on optics and experimental philosophy (the chymistry of 'crucibles'), and dismissive of natural history because of its amorphousness, its totalizing equation of an object and its *Litteraria*, its entire history through time? Or is he an Enlightenment virtuoso, the child of Newton and Locke, placing nature under the grid of classification? He seems to be the latter; his telescopes—and consequently his knowledge of navigation and astronomy—suggest his reliance on the visual, and his aptitude for the revealing limitations on field of view imposed by optical instruments (Foucault, *Order of Things* 145).

However, problematically, the Dwarf Man ignores natural history entirely, even agronomy, so central to the growth of British trade during the Industrial Revolution. Why does the Dwarf Man seem to have no

interest in natural history—the birds and crocodiles of Wordsworth’s metaphorical university-museum? The ‘gossamer thread’ on which the dwarf Man strings the ‘beads of dew’ of global geographic nomenclature represents a classification system with two interesting properties. Firstly, the gossamer implies silk (if not specifically spider silk) or some other natural animal or vegetable material, in a period before synthetics could try to out-boast nature. This is the only image of organic nature in the whole passage; the Dwarf Man treats the ‘pathless sea’ as a transport medium, ignoring its contents, and delineates geography on a political and demographic, rather than topological or ecological, basis. Secondly, the Dwarf Man uses a one-dimensional table to classify two-dimensional human geography through a three- or even four-dimensional natural history.

I believe the textual choice of ‘thread’ rather than ‘threads’ is not at all arbitrary; the Dwarf Man ‘Can string you names’, that is, enter data into a table linearly. This metaphor capably conveys how descriptive writing, in both science and art, renders multiple dimensions linear.<sup>29)</sup> So: could this threat be a one-dimensional representation of a two-dimensional spider web? If so, it provides a neat analogy to the Enlightenment grid of classification, whether the cartographer’s lines of latitude and longitude, or the grid of the Linnaean ‘System’ of botanical structure (Foucault, *Order of Things* 152).

But this seems awkward. A more likely reading, following the tone of the text, sums the Dwarf Man’s disinterest towards both natural history and organism, and his linear classification system, into a calculated attack

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29) ‘By means of structure, what representation provides in a confused and simultaneous form is analysed and thereby rendered suitable to the linear unwinding of language. In effect, description is to the object one looks at what the proposition is to the representation it expresses: its arrangement in a series, elements succeeding elements.... Natural history is a science, that is, a language, but a securely based and well-constructed one: its propositional unfolding is indisputably an articulation; the arrangement of its elements into a linear series patterns representation according to an evident and universal mode’ (Foucault, *Order of Things* 148).

by Wordsworth's *persona* on the early nineteenth-century 'virtuoso as man of business' that relates the 'virtues' of economic power, leisure, and utility to the perceived failings—the limitation of the field of vision, the inattention to the organism and the individual—of naturalism as a whole. According to Foucault, the seventeenth century de-privileged four senses in order to privilege the visual; *Prelude* Book 5 parodies this closing-down of perception in service of classification by reducing the visual dimensions available to the observing natural philosopher, over the course of one passage, from three ('globe', 'inside of the earth') to two ('maps', 'pathless sea', 'stars') to one ('gossamer thread').

The link between virtuosity and utility was not new, even in the eighteenth century. Until at least the 1620s, advice on the formation of the character of the English virtuoso emphasised 'the English ideal of public service' and 'laid predominant stress on study for use' (Houghton, "Virtuoso 1" 60, 59). Even Castiglione's advice to the courtier 'makes no appeal to curiosity... studies [poetry, art, engineering, antiquities] are not valued in themselves' (Houghton, "Virtuoso 1" 60). But Houghton notes the changes in economics and politics in the early seventeenth century that provided the wealth and leisure necessary for the rise of the Enlightenment virtuoso:

Without the enclosures and the destruction of the monasteries, American gold and silver, monopolies and joint stock companies, the virtuoso could not have existed. (Houghton, "Virtuoso 1" 61)

Consequent upheavals in social class put the aristocracy on the defensive; the character of the new virtuoso thus also embodied class-consciousness, and a desire to preserve class distinctions.<sup>30)</sup>

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30) 'Special forms of learning, hardly obtainable without wealth and leisure, take on the urgency of class distinction in an age notorious for intruding upstarts and ambitious merchants; so that knowledge of painting, blazon of arms, coins and statues become the marks of a gentleman...' (Houghton, "Virtuoso 1" 63). Houghton cites Peacham's advice that gentlemen learn heraldry in order to

Writers such as Timothy Bright and, more famously, Thomas Burton, also encouraged gentlemen to study the arts and sciences in order to combat one of the main Jacobean maladies related to excessive wealth and leisure, namely, melancholy.<sup>31</sup> We might assume that the ever-active, ever-diligent Dwarf Man virtuoso resists melancholy as effectively as he resists fear, even as he walks in the metaphorical shadow of the gothic 'prison door' of his own discourse, and on a similarly gothic path of enquiry, 'choked' and 'Rank [with] growth'.

Therefore, the *Prelude's* portrait of the Dwarf Man serves as a character assassination against the virtuoso as 'man of business'. Rather than standing for or against seventeenth- and eighteenth-century virtuosity, the text advocates one kind of virtuoso over another. The caricature of the Dwarf Man strengthens its polemic by excluding from the modern virtuoso's sphere of learning two things sacred to Wordsworth: books and nature. Even if the Dwarf Man does not read poetry or romance, he reads voraciously ('in learning and in books | He is a prodigy'). Even if he does not play in nature, he would no doubt appreciate its commercial value, and classify it. By hyperbolizing, or we might say, by compressing the virtuoso into the parody of the Dwarf Man, the text draws attention to the fields of knowledge in contention between Wordsworth's scholastic and naturalistic epistemes, between the *Kunstkammer* and the modern classification grid, between the classical virtuoso and the utilitarian virtuoso.

One subtle method by which the text accomplishes this sleight-of-hand is by conflating nature and books. Earlier in Book 5, Wordsworth has

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'discerne and know an intruding upstart, shot up with the last nights Mushroome, from an ancient descended & deserved Gentleman, whose Grandsires have had their shares in every foughten field by the English since *Edward the first*' (Peacham 154–5).

- 31) Burton recommends the study of both antiquities and natural philosophy (natural history, chemistry, astronomy, geometry, 'ravishing' algebra, engineering, etc.) to combat melancholy (Burton part 2, section 2, member 4). Bright recommends 'no better remedy' to melancholy than 'the learning of some art or science' (Bright 37, 297–8) (cited in Houghton, "Virtuoso 1" 64).



already used nature as a metaphor for the unplanned, 'unscientific' course of reading of his childhood and Coleridge's, a metaphor in which the two friends are cattle grazing on the wild pasture of books. He sketches a brief georgic of reading:

Where had we been, we two, beloved Friend,  
If we, in lieu of wandering, as we did,  
Through heights and hollows, and bye-spots of tales  
Rich with indigenous produce, open ground  
Of Fancy, happy pastures ranged at will!  
Had been attended, followed, watched, and noosed,  
Each in his several melancholy walk,  
Stringed like a poor man's Heifer at its feed,  
Led through the lanes in forlorn servitude;  
Or rather like a stalled ox shut out  
From touch of growing grass; that may not taste  
A flower till it have yielded up its sweets,  
A prelibation to the mower's scythe. (*1805 Prel* v. 233–45)<sup>32</sup>

Similarly, after the Boy of Winander passage, Wordsworth will go on to describe his educational ideal, 'A race of real children' and plead: 'May books and nature be their early joy!' (*1805 Prel* v. 436, 447). Here, in the context of epistemology and the virtuoso, the 'heights and hollows', 'bye-spots of tales', 'indigenous produce', and 'open ground | Of Fancy' are the texts and forms of knowledge available to the true virtuoso, the wanderer through nature and text (and nature as text)—the nomadic Arab-Quixote before his apocalyptic mission, sometimes aimless but always curious. Here 'melancholy', associated with the virtuoso, threatens the mind raised

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32) This passage presents fresh fodder for the reading of the 'hunger-bitten girl' and her cow in Book 10, as it connects poverty of reading with physical starvation. Similarly, Wordsworth's use of the image of the mower's scythe links the polemic of this passage to seventeenth-century poetry on both sides of the political spectrum (e.g. royalist and parliamentarian, Herrick and Marvell).

pedantically, the 'Stringed... Heifer' (a recurrence of the one-dimensional symbol).

Conversely, nature remains external to the Dwarf Man's experience. He reads, but this reading has no relationship to nature, either as a metaphorically parallel experience of pleasure, or as a locus of activity. The catalogue of the Dwarf Man's prodigious achievement 'in learning and in books' includes grammar, divinity, astronomy, chemistry, cartography and navigation, geology, politics, geography, and knowledge of 'deep experiments'—presumably of chemical compounds, mechanics, and Cartesian reasoning. But with the exception of the stars, references to natural objects remain conspicuously absent. The metaphorical cabinet of this philosopher's interests includes no fossils, seashells or coral, plants and seeds, teeth and bones; or any images, such as engravings, of such objects from natural history.

This is no accident. We can contrast the Dwarf Man's imagined closet or laboratory with the secluded home of the Solitary in Book 2 of *The Excursion*:

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)

Ten years before *The Excursion*, the absence of 'fossils, withered plants and flowers, | And tufts of mountain moss' in the imagined cabinet of the

Dwarf Man makes a polemical point regarding the status of life (including human life) as organism, as *Litteraria*, as a conflation of nature and book. The Solitary's closet notably contains fragments of art as well as philosophy: poetry and musical instruments. It also contains an 'angling-rod', a referent that signifies both nature and art to Wordsworth, since in *Prelude* Book 5 he represents his enjoyment of his father's 'golden store of books' as inseparable from the experience of reading outdoors, while fishing:

Full often through the course  
Of those glad respites in the summer-time  
When, armed with rod and line we went abroad  
For a whole day together, I have lain  
Down by thy side, O Derwent! murmuring Stream,  
On the hot stones and in the glaring sun,  
And there have read, devouring as I read,  
Defrauding the day's glory, desperate!  
Till, with a sudden bound of smart reproach,  
Such as an Idler deals with in his shame,  
I to my sport betook myself again. (1805 *Prel* v. 505–15)

In the caricature of 1804, the text carefully creates a double absence that associates the two forms of knowledge absent from the Dwarf Man's mind: nature and literature.

Thus while the Dwarf Man represents a kind of virtuoso in Book 5—a natural philosopher, dilettante, and man of business devoted to understanding every aspect of the physical world around him and the human society that inhabits it—the text denies him both nature and books (in the sense of fanciful books such as poetry and romance) on the grounds that he does not deserve to appreciate them, or to even pretend to appreciate them. The text deploys a sleight-of-hand to suggest a dependency between scholasticism and naturalism (in the form of fanciful antiquarian literature) even as it seems to condemn Cartesian mechanism

and Enlightenment naturalism for the myopia of ‘these too industrious times’.

Nature finally enters the parodic portrait, as a site of loss. The caricature continues:

All things are put to question; he must live  
Knowing that he grows wiser every day,  
Or else not live at all; and seeing, too,  
Each little drop of wisdom as it falls  
Into the dimpling cistern of his heart.  
Meanwhile old Grandame Earth is grieved to find  
The playthings, which her love designed for him,  
Unthought of: in their woodland beds the flowers  
Weep, and the river sides are all forlorn. (1805 *Prel* v. 341–9)

The text leaves it unclear as to whether ‘Grandame Earth’ offers the ‘playthings’ of nature—the ‘flowers’ and ‘river sides’—to the philosopher as objects for his ‘deep experiments’, or merely for idleness and repose. But as Houghton suggests, the identification and description of the virtuoso in the seventeenth century requires judgments on grounds of sensibility and tone (Houghton, “Virtuoso 1” 57). Here, in the first years of the nineteenth century, Wordsworth’s text offers a warm pastoral to the insensible virtuoso. The personified images—weeping flowers and forlorn banks—gesture to the pastoral tradition of classical and Early Modern poetry. But the Dwarf Man seems to neglect nature on scientific as well as aesthetic grounds. The text laments his lack of play in nature—an exhortation to one scholastic ideal—but denies his involvement even on the grounds of agriculture, livestock, and forestry. Thus the portrait of the Dwarf Man in Book 5 is a carefully managed representation of an anathema, as biased through omission as its contrary, the Arab-Quixote, is idealized.

The conclusion of the caricature gives further evidence to the text’s manipulation of the representation of modernity. The final lines of the Dwarf Man portrait perform a neat substitution of fancy for nature:

Now this is hollow; 'tis a life of lies  
 From the beginning, and in lies must end.  
 Forth bring him to the air of common sense,  
 And fresh and shewy as it is, the Corps  
 Slips from us into powder. Vanity,  
 That is his soul, there lives he, and there moves;  
 It is the soul of every thing he seeks;  
 That gone, nothing is left which he can love;  
 Nay, if a thought of purer birth should rise  
 To carry him towards a better clime,  
 Some busy helper still is on the watch  
 To drive him back and pound him like a Stray  
 Within the pinfold of his own conceit;  
 Which is his home, his natural dwelling-place.  
 Oh! give us once again the Wishing-Cap  
 Of Fortunatus, and the Invisible Coat  
 Of Jack the Giant-Killer, Robin Hood,  
 And Sabra in the Forest with Saint George!  
 The Child whose love is here, at least doth reap  
 One precious gain, that he forgets himself. (1805 *Prel* v. 350–369)

The Dwarf Man lives his 'life of lies' away from 'the air of common sense'; he is trapped—in an image of eclogue that echoes the earlier georgic—'like a Stray [sheep] | Within the pinfold of his own conceit, | Which is his home, his natural dwelling place' (1805 *Prel* v. 350, 352, 361–3). Without nature, the horizons of the Dwarf Man's explorations (travel 'towards a better clime') will be limited as a sheepfold's, just as Wordsworth described an alternate childhood without free reign over his reading as being a 'stallèd ox shut out | From touch of growing grass'.

But as eclogue replaces georgic, a transposition occurs from nature to books of fancy and lore. In the former example (Wordsworth and Coleridge as young oxen), the signifier 'nature' refers to the concept 'books', creating the metaphor of 'reading as grazing'. In the latter image, signifiers

that suggest 'nature' ('air of common sense', 'better clime') point to the concept 'nature' (the 'playthings' which the Dwarf Man ignores). But as a basic poststructuralist reading shows: in this latter metaphor, the 'air of common sense' and the 'better clime' that lead the thinker away from the sheepfold are themselves already concepts. What do the 'air of common sense' and the 'thought of purer birth' point to, as actual objects? By the end of the portrait, it becomes clear that the referents are not the actual images of nature neglected by the Dwarf Man, the 'flowers' and 'river sides'.

Rather, they are the non-existent objects of fancy and lore: the wishing-cap of Fortunatus, the invisible coat of Jack the Giant-Killer, etc. We have come full circle, from the legacy of the virtuoso to the contents of the most fantastical *Kunstkammern* of the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries—saints' relics; fantastical natural objects like unicorns' horns; and the penny books of eighteenth-century folk tales and nursery rhymes. The arguments of *Prelude* Book 5 subtly undermine many of the conclusions of mechanism and naturalism, while using the materials of the cabinet and the virtuoso to gesture towards their usefulness in productively uniting scholasticism and naturalism (which Bredekamp suggests was an essential aspect of their early methodologies). The Arab-Quixote is just a dream, but a dream of an unencumbered, Orientalist virtuoso, a man in whose 'madness... reason did lie couched'. Similarly, the Dwarf Man caricature sets up a straw man of nineteenth-century virtuosity without natural history, in order to argue apparently for nature, but more passionately for fantasy.

Wordsworth's plea for the new intellectual child ('not too wise, | Too learned, or too good') at the end of this section of Book 5 mimics the thrust of Foucault's concept of genealogy, the idea that 'truth or being lies not at the root of what we know and what we are but the exteriority of accidents' (Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" 374). Foucault's idea of origin is not a solid foundation but 'an unstable assemblage of faults, fissures, and heterogeneous layers that threaten the fragile inheritor from within or from underneath' (Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History" 374). This is the legacy of the *Kunstammer*, the idea that the imposition of the grid of

classification necessarily cleaves fissures and instabilities into knowledge as a whole, for the sake of advancement.

Wordsworth, on the leading edge of the poetic response to developments in natural philosophy that would sweep through the nineteenth century, considers the formation of his childhood consciousness in Book 2, his education in Book 3, and his love of fancy and romance in Book 5. Through this self-examination, he locates a discrepancy between the philosophical principles that have formed his reasoning mind, and the materials and experiences that this mind values. In similar language to Foucault's quotation above, Wordsworth enquires, regarding the 'mighty workmen of our late age' who strive to bridge 'the forward chaos of futurity':

when will they be taught  
That in the unreasoning progress of the world  
A wiser Spirit is at work for us,  
A better eye than theirs, most prodigal  
Of blessings, and most studious of our good,  
even in what seem our most unfruitful hours?  
(1805 *Prel* v. 370, 372, 383–8)

## Conclusion

In conclusion, while images of cabinets and museums, collectors and virtuosos, point to Wordsworth's general resistance to categorised and 'scientific' knowledge, they exhibit instability and reversibility as to whether this resistance is directed against classical methods of knowledge (the patterned chaos of scholasticism and superstition, embodied by the *Kunstkammer* or early museum) or modern ones (natural philosophy's classifications and systematizations). Wordsworth seeks, as he writes in Book 5 of *The Prelude*, 'Knowledge not purchased with the loss of power!' (1805 *Prel* v. 449). This exhortation carries the desire for a totalising perspective, an objectivity that would require him to stand outside of knowledge itself. Yet it also carries with it a preference for not discarding

the minutiae and 'errors' of history—whether those of his culture and history, or his own experiences. Wordsworth's resort to the metaphors of the cabinet and the virtuoso keeps the problem of knowledge alive in the text, even as the poet repeatedly refutes the cabinet's epistemological method as divisive and error-ridden, opposed to holistic ideas of the individual and the holistic organism.

In the context of seventeenth-century thought, this reading affirms Basil Willey's. Willey puts Wordsworth's texts—like those of John Evelyn, Thomas Browne, Thomas Sprat, and Joseph Glanvill—on the fulcrum between scholasticism on the one hand, and empiricism and naturalism on the other.<sup>33)</sup> This paper has attempted to bring Willey's reading into the context of current epistemological theory, and the rapid expansion of scholarship devoted to the *Kunstkammer*, the virtuoso (including the antiquary and the natural philosopher), and the scholastic milieu from which the modern epistemes gradually or rapidly emerged, in order to shed new light on particular unstable images in Wordsworth's texts, and consider how they relate to the development of his creative imagination. From this perspective, a number of epistemological terms in Wordsworth's poetry, including 'cabinet', 'curiosities', 'antiquarian', 'philosopher', and 'fancy', can—as modern scholarship has taught us about the term 'Romanticism' itself—contain intrinsically heterogeneous, even contradictory meanings. Subsequent scholarship should explore these instabilities, in order to more fully develop an understanding of Wordsworth's texts as some of the most notable products of tensions between pre-Cortesian scholasticism and pre-Kantian naturalism.

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33) See, as principle texts, Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici* (1642); Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* (1646); Browne, *Nature's Cabinet Unlock'd* (1657); Thomas Sprat, *The History of the Royal Society of London* (1667); Joseph Glanvill, *The Vanity of Dogmatizing* (1661); Glanvill, "The Agreement of Reason and Religion" in *Essays on Several Important Subjects in philosophy and Religion* (1676).



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## Abstract

This paper examines examples of the language of the *Kunstkammer* or *Wunderkammer* (the collector's cabinet of art, antiquities, 'curiosities', and 'wonders'), and the character of the 'virtuoso' (the collector, antiquary, connoisseur, and natural philosopher) and its parodies in William Wordsworth's autobiographical epic poem, *The Prelude* (completed 1805). The paper uses a theoretical methodology based on ideas in Foucault's *The Order of Things* and Horst Bredekamp's *The Lure of Antiquity and the Cult of the Machine*. It further draws on the historical context of tensions between scholasticism and naturalism in the work of writers including Basil Willey, Walter Houghton, and John Brewer. Close readings of four passages in *The Prelude* related to cabinets and virtuosi then invite discussion of the text's complex positions on nature, classification, and mechanistic philosophy in the context of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century epistemologies. The paper argues that the images of the 'cabinet' and the 'virtuoso' are highly unstable signifiers in their historical contexts. These images allow the poem to simultaneously critique opposing forces in intellectual history. On the one hand, these images critique the naturalism of the 'New Science' of the Enlightenment—the legacies of Bacon, Kepler, Descartes, and Locke—while making assumptions about its mechanistic and utilitarian goals, and its devotion to classifying and categorising objects and phenomena. On the other hand, these images also carry an implicit critique of the supernatural scholasticism of the classical and pre-Early-Modern periods, which manifests in the late eighteenth century as retrograde antiquarianism, scientific dilettantism, and the character of the myopic antiquary or collector. Here the text makes contrasting assumptions about the disorder, anti-historicism, and superstitions of the *Kunstkammer* as the prototypical museum. While the *Prelude* texts generally position Wordsworth against mechanistic natural philosophy, in favour of a more superstitious scholasticism, they simultaneously display a methodical, analytical Enlightenment mind at work. Through readings of passages of cabinets and virtuosos in Books 2, 3, and 5 of *The Prelude*, the paper concludes that

Wordsworth's occasional use of these images in his work—what he might term objects removed from context in order to be classified, arranged, and positioned 'In disconnection, dead and spiritless'—significantly bears on a central concern in his poetry: the relationship between history, nature, and the creative imagination.