The Excursion
End Notes

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END NOTES

A Field Guide to the Original

Since I began sharing drafts of *The Excursion: A Modern American Retelling*, the question I am asked most frequently is this: *"Do I need to read William Wordsworth's original poem to understand this book?"*

The short answer is: No.

The long answer is: You should, but you probably won't, and I don't blame you.

Wordsworth's *The Excursion*, published in 1814, is a massive, sprawling epic. It runs for nine books and consists of over 9,000 lines of blank verse. It is philosophical, dense, and moves at the speed of a contemplative hike in the nineteenth century—which is to say, very slowly. It was controversial in its time and remains daunting in ours.

However, the reason I wrote this retelling is that the *ghosts* inside that dense poem are startlingly modern. Wordsworth was writing at a moment of terrified transition. The Industrial Revolution was tearing apart the English countryside; the political hopes of the French Revolution had collapsed into violence; and the rural poor were being displaced by economic forces they couldn't control.

Does that sound familiar?

When I looked at my own backyard in Oakland County, Michigan—at the "Rust Belt" landscape of shuttered factories, polarized politics, and the gig economy—I realized we are living through the exact same anxieties.

So, I wrote this book to ease the burden. I wanted to extract the timeless architecture of Wordsworth's argument and rebuild it using modern materials: vinyl siding, fentanyl, and foreclosure signs.

For those curious about how the translation works, or for the students among you who want to see the gears turning, here is a guide to the changes I made.

The Cast: Archetypes Reimagined

The Wanderer: Samuel Walker (The Surveyor)

In 1814, the hero was a Peddler—a man who walked the countryside selling goods and gathering wisdom. In 2026, a peddler doesn't make much sense. I changed him to a **Land Surveyor**. Why? Because a surveyor deals in "The Grid." He looks for the "Iron Pin" buried deep in the earth. This fit perfectly with the theme that truth is objective and buried beneath the surface rot.

The Solitary: Dr. Elias Thorne (The Cynic)

Wordsworth's "Solitary" was a man who lost his family and then lost his faith in the French Revolution. Today, our disillusionment isn't usually about French royalty; it's about the American System. Elias is a former Political Science professor who believed in the "Social Contract" until a drunk driver (and a failed legal system) proved to him that chaos rules. He represents the modern urge to withdraw into a silo of despair.

The Pastor: Father Tom Cole

Wordsworth's Pastor was a country parson in the Church of England. I made Father Tom a Catholic priest at **St. Jude's** (the patron saint of hopeless cases) because the Catholic emphasis on the "Communion of Saints" provided a strong counter-argument to Elias's individualism.

The Poet: Jim Miller (The Gig Worker)

In the original, the narrator is simply "The Poet," a largely passive observer. I wanted our narrator to have skin in the game. Jim is a "Millennial Drifter," paralyzed by the instability of the modern economy. He isn't just watching; he is trying to figure out how to survive.

BOOK I: THE RUINED COTTAGE vs. THE GHOST SUBDIVISION

This is the most direct translation in the book. Wordsworth's famous "Ruined Cottage" tells the story of Margaret, whose husband Robert joins the army out of poverty, leaving her to decline and die in their decaying home.

I transposed this to a **"Ghost Subdivision"**—one of those developments stalled by the 2008 crash.

- **Robert the Weaver** became **Rob the Carpenter**, who leaves not for war, but for the **Bakken Oil Fields** in North Dakota.
- **Margaret** became **Maggie**, who dies not of a broken heart in a cottage, but of heart failure ("Waiting") in a foreclosure wrapped in Tyvek.

The tragedy remains identical: macro-economic forces destroying the domestic sanctuary.

BOOKS II–IV: THE ROCKY VALE vs. THE FEN

Wordsworth placed his Solitary in a dramatic, rocky valley. I moved Elias to a **fen** (a peat-forming wetland) off Fish Lake Road.

- **Why the Fen?** A fen is biologically fascinating—it preserves bone but dissolves soft tissue. It is the perfect metaphor for Elias's nihilism. He thinks he is stripping life down to the bone ("The Subtraction").
- **The Debate:** In the original, the debate is largely theological. I shifted it to be more civic. Samuel argues that **"Hope is a discipline."** This is a crucial update. We are not waiting for divine intervention; we are doing the work of maintenance.

BOOKS V–VII: THE CHURCHYARD vs. THE LEDGER

This is the heart of the poem. The group tours the cemetery to prove to the cynic that life has meaning. I kept the structure but updated the "Case Studies" to reflect American archetypes.

- **The Jacobite & The Hanoverian – Frank & Joe:** Wordsworth described two enemies from a civil war buried together. I changed this to a **Union Democrat** and a **Tea Party Republican**. It allows us to address our current polarization and show that, in the end, we help each other to the bathroom in the nursing home. Biology trumps ideology.
- **The Miner – Silas the Scrapper:** Wordsworth had a man searching for gold. I changed him to a "Scrapper" collecting copper and junk. It's a very specific Rust Belt activity—finding value in the wreckage.
- **The Matron – Mrs. Higgins:** The "Saint of Economy" who raised six kids on minimum wage is a direct tribute to the endurance of the working-class mother.
- **The Unrequited Lover – Ethan:** In 1814, a young man dies of a broken heart. In 2026, he dies of **fentanyl**. It captures the same sensitivity and the desire to "stop the noise" (or close the aperture) of a harsh world.

BOOK VIII: THE PARSONAGE vs. THE PUBLIC HEARTH

Wordsworth uses this book to critique the Factory System. I used it to critique the **"Economy of Nostalgia."** Elias points out that the town now sells "rustic chic" decor (old plows, saws) to tourists—we sell the memory of work rather than the work itself.

We move from the abstract debate to **"Battle Alley Brews"** and then the **Farmhouse**. The introduction of Sarah (The Matron) provides the feminine, practical counter-weight to the men's abstract philosophizing. She doesn't argue; she cooks dinner.

BOOK IX: THE LAKE vs. THE WATERSHED

The original poem ends on a boat on a lake, with a heavy emphasis on Pantheism (God in Nature).

I moved the finale to the **Buckhorn Creek** to focus on the **Watershed**. The "Active Principle" isn't just a spiritual vibe; it is a hydrological fact. The water flows from Elias's swamp, cleanses itself, and feeds the farm.

The Resolution:

In the original, the Solitary is not magically "cured." He simply agrees to spend another day with his friends. I kept this quiet ending. Elias tosses a stone into the river, admitting his data was "incomplete." He doesn't find God, but he finds his Neighbor.

And really, that is the point of *The Excursion*. We don't have to solve the universe. We just have to agree to walk each other home.

—Peter James Stouffer

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