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‘A Perfect Republic’: Labour, Landscape, and Property in Wordsworth’s Guide to the Lakes

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> And we shall honor our Mother the earth, by laboring her in righteousnesse, and leaving her free from bondage and oppression.
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> —Gerrard Winstanley, Letter to Lord Fairfax

IN HIS 2018 overview of the history of Romantic ecological literary criticism, Jeremy Davies distinguishes between two potential paths which that flourishing sub-field could have taken between the 1970s and today. One, which would have taken the work of John Barrell and Raymond Williams as its foundation, did not come to pass; indeed, it ‘would have been very different to the one that we now know,’ concerned with '[q]uestions of labour, consumption, landownership, and class’.[1] The one which did come to pass took as its foundation the early 1990s work of Jonathan Bate, Karl Kroeber, and James McKusick, itself inspired in large part by Kroeber’s groundbreaking and influential study of Wordsworth’s ‘ecological holiness’ of 1973.[2] In place of Barrell and

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[1] Jeremy Davies, ‘Romantic Ecocriticism: History and Prospects’, *Literature Compass*, 15.9 (2018), p. 2.

[2] Particularly Jonathan Bate, *Romantic Ecology: Wordsworth and the Environmental Tradition* (London: Taylor & Francis Group, 2013); Karl Kroeber, *Ecological Literary Criticism: Romantic Imagining and the Biology of Mind* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994); James C. McKusick, *Green Writing:*

Williams's concern for the economy and politics of landscape, the most prominent thread of Romantic ecocriticism between then and today has concerned itself with, in the words of Scott Hess, 'philosophical issues and celebrated universalized ideals of ecological dwelling, holism, and consciousness.'[3] One of the classic test cases for this thread has been the work of William Wordsworth, who has become a kind of Romantic ecologist *par excellence*. In what follows, I make the argument for the relevance of cultural materialist concerns over land politics and economics to an ecocritical understanding of Wordsworth, particularly as these concerns meet in the twin figures of labour and property: I hope to show here that, despite their elision from so much ecocritical scholarship, these concepts are central to Wordsworth's thought, and central to any consideration of the climate crisis as it stands today.

I will address Wordsworth's position throughout this article, but I will begin by elaborating on ecocriticism's problematic elision of labour and property. This has largely taken place through the adoption and spread of a set of ideal concepts, beginning with a 'paradigm' that 'pervades early Romantic ecology in particular,' the 1970s 'deep ecology' of Arne Naess and others.[4] The legacy of Jonathan Bate's concern with 'dwelling' and 'rootedness,'[5] for instance, can be seen in a more or less diffuse form in Kate Rigby's 'Romantic resacralization of nature,' in Dewey Hall's flat dismissal of political concerns in favour of a purified tradition of 'Romantic naturalists,' through to Anne-Lise François's 'nonemphatic revelation' in her groundbreaking *Open Secrets* (2008).[6] These keywords do represent, as Hess suggests, 'ideals', but a compelling alternative representation – traceable through this legacy – is that of *possibilities.* It is in precisely this that the value of Romantic ecocriticism lies – its search, in Anahid

Romanticism and Ecology (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010); Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (Picador, 2001); Karl Kroeber, '"Home at Grasmere": Ecological Holiness', *PMLA*, 89.1 (1974), 132–41.

[3] Scott Hess, *William Wordsworth and the Ecology of Authorship: The Roots of Environmentalism in Nineteenth-Century Culture* (Charlottesville & London: University of Virginia Press, 2012), p. 9.

[4] Ibid., p. 9; David Pepper, *Modern Environmentalism: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1996), p. 17.

[5] Bate, *Romantic Ecology*, p. 45.

[6] Catherine E. Rigby, *Topographies of the Sacred: The Poetics of Place in European Romanticism* (Charlottesville & London: University of Virginia Press, 2004), p. 49; Dewey W. Hall, *Romantic Naturalists, Early Environmentalists: An Ecocritical Study, 1789-1912* (Surrey: Ashgate, 2014), p. 1; Anne-Lise François, *Open Secrets: The Literature of Uncounted Experience* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008), p. xvi.

Nersessian's words, 'for alternative ways of engaging with the material world.'[7] For François, these alternative engagements – found in textual moments of seemingly 'passiv[e] and inconsequen[t]' action – must be divorced from 'the capitalist investment in value and work and the Enlightenment allegiance to rationalism and unbounded progress,' or in short, from instrumental reason.[8]

The value of this thread of Romantic ecocriticism cannot be overstated. If the seemingly inexorable 'progress of this storm,' to borrow Andreas Malm's term, can indeed be stopped, a reparative relationship with nature will indeed require a movement beyond instrumental reason, and I am convinced that Romanticism can provide a blueprint for this.[9] But the search for alternative relations necessitates a turn towards moments of 'grace, understood both as a simplicity or slightness of formal means and as *a freedom from work*.'[10] This is entirely understandable. The concept of labour is a touchstone of instrumental (or for Bate, 'utilitarian') reason; whether treated within a capitalist or an anti-capitalist framework, any focus on labour can only repeat Enlightenment discourses of progress and rationality. In reading the Romantics, then, ecocritics have tended to privilege moments of 'aesthetic experience,' often in texts read as 'apologia for the contemplative life,' and this has imposed some characteristic limits upon these readings.[11] These are exemplified by Jonathan Bate's theoretical stance in *Romantic Ecology*. His turn to reading 'with the grain'[12] is figured, in his highly polemical introduction, as a retort to the 'crude old model of Left and Right' underlying the New Historical theories he derided as 'beginning to look redundant as Marxist-Leninism collapses in Eastern Europe.'[13] Those I have classed as Batesian or 'idealist' ecocritics, then, in distancing themselves from the concept of labour and in adopting broadly reparative reading practices, have tended to elide historical change

[7] Anahid Nersessian, 'Romantic Ecocriticism Lately', *Literature Compass*, 15.1 (2018), p. e12433 (p. 7).

[8] François, pp. xvi, xv.

[9] Andreas Malm, *The Progress of This Storm: Nature and Society in a Warming World* (London: Verso, 2020). I use the term 'reparative' here advisedly, as should become clear.

[10] François, p. xvi, emphasis mine.

[11] Ibid., p. xvii.

[12] Jonathan Bate, 'Letter to the Editor', *London Review of Books*, 15 August 1991.

[13] Bate, *Romantic Ecology*, p. 2.

altogether.[14] Even where this work is explicitly anti-capitalist, as is the case with François, their 'shared presupposition,'

> too deep-rooted to be articulated fully, is that human attitudes and sensibilities are the fundamental drivers of environmental change, and that the reverential spirit of true ecology can manifest itself – as it did in the Romantics and must do again today – in relative independence from the historical circumstances in which texts are produced.[15]

This notion has received powerful blows in recent years, on two fronts: nearer the end of this section I will follow Andreas Malm in questioning the value of this turn away from labour itself, but first I would like to address the tendency, in this Batesian strain of ecological criticism, to treat non-instrumental (contemplative, aesthetic, passive) action as inherently independent of historical circumstances. Scott Hess's 2012 monograph, *William Wordsworth and the Ecology of Authorship,* powerfully exemplifies this line of critique. Hess works to 'call into question the ways in which [Wordsworth's] writing has been invoked as an ecological ideal in recent years,' examining the particular construction of nature to be found in the writing of William Wordsworth and returning it to its historical context in Wordsworth's 'specific social position.'[16] This construction, which Hess reads as emerging from broader trends among the early nineteenth-century middle-class, is

> identified with individual consciousness and identity, as opposed to social or communal life; with aesthetic leisure and spirituality, separated from everyday work, subsistence, and economic activity; and with 'disinterested' aesthetic contemplation and the forms of high culture, as opposed to more social, participative, and sensually immersed forms of culture and relationship.[17]

'Environmental criticism of the Batesian variety,' Hess continues,

> in reclaiming Wordsworth as a universalized 'poet of nature,' unfortunately also reclaims many of these social and cultural assumptions under the contemporary

[14] Hess, p. 5; Davies, 'Romantic Ecocriticism', p. 6.

[15] Davies, 'Romantic Ecocriticism', p. 5.

[16] Hess, pp. 8–9.

[17] Ibid., p. 3.

> sign of ecology, often without self-awareness. Such criticism tends to associate 'nature' with silence, solitude, high-aesthetic activity, and contemplation, as opposed to (for instance) popular culture, productive labor, sports and games, and sociability.[18]

For Hess, 'Wordsworth's own construction of "nature" was primarily cultural and aesthetic, not ecological'[19] – and, even more importantly, was dependent on a class position that permitted a non-laborious[20] relation to nature.[21] The elision of the historical relations underlying Romantic moments of aesthetic engagement with nature lead these ecological readings of Wordsworth to read *into*, rather than read, his work, imposing contemporary ecological thought on a historically distinct text.[22] This is forcefully illustrated by Hess's reading of Wordsworth's *Guide to the Lakes*, a core text in Bate's *Romantic Ecology*. The *Guide* stands for Hess not as a lesson in how to dwell in a landscape or locality, but as a sustained aestheticisation of the Lake District, textualising it as a middle-class space of contemplation and visual observation, a space removed from, and exclusive of, the 'social, participative, and sensually engaged ethos of laboring-class culture.'[23] When Wordsworth reads the repeated visits by 'persons of pure taste' to the Lakes as testifying to their 'deem[ing] the district a sort of national property, in which every man has a right and interest who has an eye to perceive and

[18] Ibid., p. 5.

[19] Ibid., p. 11.

[20] In this article, the term 'laborious' should be taken in the archaic sense as meaning 'that which relates to labour'.

[21] This encompasses travel, non-instrumental walking, and especially contemplative time and space. For an overview of Wordsworth's relation to contemplation and spaces of contemplation, with some intimations towards the property relations in which this was bound, see Jessica Fay, *Wordsworth's Monastic Inheritance: Poetry, Place, and the Sense of Community* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

[22] Cf. John Barrell's acute observation that Bate 'paraphrases with a serene confidence, untroubled by the ambiguities and indeterminacies' of Wordsworth's language. John Barrell, 'Constable's Plenty', *London Review of Books*, 15 August 1991 <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v13/n15/john-barrell/constable-s-plenty> [accessed 9 March 2024].

[23] Hess, p. 6.

a heart to enjoy,' the visual metaphor should be taken as telling: this is no ecological socialism, but a middle-class 'museumification' of an agricultural region.[24]

Hess's argument ultimately represents, therefore, a watershed moment in Wordsworthian ecocriticism. Its critique of Batesian ecocriticism can, however, be expanded. The refusal to historicise non-laborious action does weaken Romantic ecocriticism's claim to locate in Wordsworth and others non-instrumental ways to engage with nature, but the goal of identifying such engagements itself remains both sound and useful to those looking to construct an ecologically-oriented society. The turn away from labour altogether, though, seems to limit the scope of these texts to 'the day after the revolution:'[25] for in the Romantic era – which was also the era of the 'shorter industrial revolution'[26] and of the height of Parliamentary enclosure – just as in the grip of our present climate crisis, humans relate to nature in a climatologically significant way only 'inside a sphere of human praxis that could be summed up in one word as labour.'[27] 'In a warming world,' Malm writes elsewhere,

> there is good reason to privilege labour as the pivot of material flows. The rise and rise of large-scale fossil fuel combustion has not occurred in the sphere of play, sex, sleep, leisure, philosophical contemplation or aesthetic appreciation but precisely, and evidently, in that of labour.[28]

Humans created global warming in the sphere of labour, and will equally halt or undo it in that sphere, whether as a change of existing practice or through the introduction of new kinds of labour on the land, such as rewilding. As such, if 'attitudes or sensibilities' are the 'drivers of environmental change,' it is only as they emerge from historical property relations. In Malm's concise phrasing, 'social property relations form

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[24] William Wordsworth, *Guide to the Lakes*, ed. by Saeko Yoshikawa, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022), p. 68; Hess, ch. 5, passim.

[25] Hannah Arendt, 'Reflections: Civil Disobedience', *The New Yorker*, 4 September 1970 <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1970/09/12/reflections-civil-disobedience> [accessed 6 September 2024].

[26] Jeremy Davies, 'Introduction: Romantic Studies and the "Shorter Industrial Revolution"', *Studies in Romanticism*, 61.2 (2022), 187–202.

[27] Andreas Malm, *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam-Power and the Roots of Global Warming* (London: Verso, 2016), p. 6.

[28] Malm, *The Progress of This Storm*, p. 160.

the central axis along which humans relate to the rest of nature through relations to one another,'[29] and so an ecocriticism which can inform a comprehensive historical understanding of the climate crisis – and of what we must do to halt or slow it – must take account of the historical property relations which compel and drive the destruction of natural ecosystems.

In light of Hess's and Malm's critiques, I would suggest that if one believes in the value of Wordsworth's potential contribution to contemporary ecological thought, then one will have to seek that value somewhere other than Wordsworth's 'ecological' discourse, which is usually identified with non-laborious action and which is primarily subsumed, as Hess shows, into broader aesthetic discourses which arose from specific property relations.[30] Wordsworth was, however, a powerful and prescient political and economic thinker, whose discussions of human self-organisation often took place within the context of land, landscapes, and nature.[31] Rather than focusing on nature, locality, or 'dwelling,' I intend to draw on the spirit of Barrell and Williams to suggest that Wordsworth was actively concerned with questions of agricultural economics and industrialism, particularly as they relate to *property.* The *Guide to the Lakes* is, as I will show here, a potent example of Wordsworth's land politics and economics, immersed in the language and ideas of his political forebears.

I intend to trace three different political discourses which coexist within the *Guide* – Lockean, Burkean, and Republican – which address the problematic relationship between nature and its enclosure as property through the concept of labour (a different aspect of the role it plays in translating capitalist property relations into a climate crisis).

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[29] Ibid., p. 162.

[30] Cf. John Barrell's still-extraordinary work on the picturesque in *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place, 1730-1840: An Approach to the Poetry of John Clare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), *The Dark Side of the Landscape: The Rural Poor in English Painting, 1730-1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), and *English Literature in History, 1730-80: An Equal, Wide Survey* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), as well as Tim Fulford's chapter on William Gilpin in *Landscape, Liberty, and Authority: Poetry, Criticism, and Politics from Thomson to Wordsworth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), ch. 3.

[31] For previous studies focusing on Wordsworth's explicit politics and economics, see David Simpson, *Wordsworth's Historical Imagination: The Poetry of Displacement* (New York: Methuen, 1987); Fulford, *Landscape, Liberty, and Authority; Philip Connell, Romanticism, Economics and the Question of 'Culture'* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

I will first introduce labour as the hinge concept through which Locke explains the origins of private property, the fact of labour having been undertaken representing a claim to ownership. I will then go on to examine how Wordsworth's focus on labour shifts, in a more Burkean discourse, from an understanding of labour as a singular, undivided concept, the presence of which can justify property, to labour as a *process* which can be qualitatively judged, and which thus has the capacity to justify or condemn the specific types of property associated with specific laborious processes. I will conclude by introducing a third discourse, that of seventeenth-century Republicanism: a political language which emphasised active civic participation in place of a monarchy, but only amongst those freed from dependence and its attendant political corruptions through the ownership of property in land. This discourse will provide an overarching frame within which Wordsworth's approach to property can be understood.

One consequence of this focus is that ecology *strictu sensu* will retreat into the background for much of the reading that is to follow. Romantic ecocriticism's focus on contemplative or aesthetic engagements with nature has led to readings which look remarkably green: they close in on representations of the natural world, which, for all that they are mediated by aesthetic discourses (the picturesque), appear fresh, and at hand. My contention, however, is that a reading of the mediating social relations that seem rather to separate society from nature offers us a more acute look at how we got into this situation, and at what kind of societal changes might offer us a way out.[32]

Land, Labour, and Property, from Locke to Wordsworth

To begin teasing out Wordsworth's considerations of property, I will start with Section Second of the *Guide*, 'Aspect of the Country, as Affected by its Inhabitants.' This section, as the title suggests, is the most overt consideration of economics and property relations in the text: although the substance of Wordsworth's depiction of the material history of the Lakes has been strongly critiqued,[33] what I am concerned with is rather the *manner* in which Wordsworth connects the changes humans have made to the landscape of the Lake District to his history of the different property forms which have existed in the region.

[32] Cf. Andreas Malm, 'Against Hybridism: Why We Need to Distinguish between Nature and Society, Now More than Ever', *Historical Materialism*, 27.2 (2019), 156–87.

[33] See Hess, pp. 86–94, 102; Simpson, pp. 79–107.

This connection closely echoes John Locke's movements in the fifth chapter of his 1690 *Second Treatise on Government*, 'On Property,' which attempts to reformulate the very foundation of property ownership. Duncan Wu notes that Wordsworth 'was examined on Locke at St John's College, Cambridge, in June 1789 [...]. In 1827 he described the Essay as the 'best of Locke's works [...] in which he attempts the least.'[34] The latter comment suggests some familiarity with other of Locke's writings; whether or not this includes the Treatise is unknown, but the importance of Locke's work to the post–Glorious Revolution version of capitalism hegemonic by Wordsworth's adulthood suggests that he would have been familiar with the basic concepts: Locke's advocacy of the Great Recoinage 'paved the way for the Financial Revolution,'[35] and so underpinned the development of the national debt and of paper money, important political concepts throughout the first half of the nineteenth century, as well as the expansion of British imperialism.[36]

Locke wrote to counter the idea, unpalatable after the English and Williamite Revolutions, that 'the holding of private property was [...] made possible by, and conditional on, the property-holder's subjection to the king;'[37] in thus writing to circumvent a reliance on monarchy, he begins from the position that land was given by God to man in common. The fifth chapter of the *Treatise*, then, works to justify the enclosure of common land as property:

> [...] 'tis very clear, that God, as King *David* says, *Psal*. CXV. xvj. *has given the Earth to the Children of Men*, given it to Mankind in common. But this being supposed,

[34] Duncan Wu, *Wordsworth's Reading 1770–1799* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 88.
[35] Stefan Eich, 'John Locke and the Politics of Monetary Depoliticization', *Modern Intellectual History*, 17.1 (2020), 1–28 (p. 2).
[36] The cultural importance of the national debt and paper money – linked controversies – can be seen best in William Cobbett, *Paper Against Gold: Or, The History and Mystery of the Bank of England, of the Debt, of the Stocks, of the Sinking Fund, and of All the Other Tricks and Contrivances, Carried on by the Means of Paper Money* (London: W. Cobbett, 1828); see also Alexander Dick, *Romanticism and the Gold Standard: Money, Literature, and Economic Debate in Britain 1790-1830* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), esp. Ch. 3. For Wordsworth's personal connection to the expansion of Empire, see Alethea Hayter, *The Wreck of the Abergavenny: One of Britain's Greatest Maritime Disasters and Its Links to Literary Genius* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2002).
[37] Robert P. Irvine, 'Labor and Commerce in Locke and Early Eighteenth-Century English Georgic', *English Literary History*, 76.4 (2009), 963–88 (p. 964).

> it seems to some a very great difficulty, how any one should ever come to have a *Property* in any thing [...].[38]

Locke's well-known and incredibly influential answer to this is that one's ability to make land productive through *labour* legitimises property ownership. This is to say: the *fact* that labour has been applied to the land, largely regardless of the kind of labour in question, legitimates its enclosure as property. In his classic formulation: 'Whatsoever then he removes out of the State that Nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his *Labour* with it, and joyned to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his *Property*'[39] (27.4–7). The relationship between property and land that this produces can be expressed visually as follows:

> *Nature — [Labour] → Property*

where *labour* becomes a kind of hinge between common land and its enclosure. This figure is necessarily reductive, and may seem slightly over-complicated – if we follow Locke's words there, it would be more simply expressed as *Nature + Labour = Property*. But by using a right-facing arrow which moves from nature to property, expressing enclosure, and which, to reach property, needs to pass through the concept of labour, I express a rhetorical relationship between these concepts, in which labour does not only take on an *explanatory* role for the existence of property, as Locke would explicitly put it, but also a *justificatory* role. In short, my figure emphasises labour as a hinge concept in both Locke's material sense, and in his rhetorical sense. I will return to this figure near the end of the article, but I hope it will serve for now to represent the movement from Locke's explanation of property to the rhetorical reading which is to follow.

This is, indeed, an oft-elided movement in readings of the Treatise – a movement from the *genetic* account of individual plots of land (smallholdings) to the *justification* of forms of property accumulation, in particular gentlemen's estates.[40] Given that the enclosure of a smallholding relies upon the personal application of labour, Irvine notes that '[t]he amount of property that can be claimed through labor on this basis is clearly

[38] John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, ed. by Peter Laslett (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), paras. 25.6–10.

[39] Ibid., paras. 27.4–7.

[40] This movement receives its most thorough treatment in Irvine, pp. 964–973.

quite limited, for purely practical reasons.'[41] 'But to this practical limitation,' Irvine continues,

> Locke adds two moral provisos. The first proviso is implicit in Locke's denial that one man's appropriation of part of the world necessarily impoverishes everyone else, 'at least where there is enough, and as good left in common for others' (*T*, 27.12–13; this limitation is repeated at paragraph 33). This implies that where appropriation does not leave 'enough and as good' for others, that appropriation is not legitimate. The second proviso stipulates that the property thus claimed is only legitimate so long as it is not then wasted: it must be used (a crop eaten or bartered, land worked) by the owner.[42]

This, of course, raises a problem for the justification of forms of property accumulation. Locke's work-around, Irvine argues, is a kind of rhetorical sleight of hand regarding the scope of the term 'labour,' which, in the original formulation quoted above, seems to be necessarily limited to manual labour. In Locke's discourse, the introduction of money (and the broader money economy) allows the fruits of any given property to be traded to others (the enclosure thus no longer impoverishing anyone) and for these fruits to be exchanged for something non-perishable (negating waste).[43] In this sense,

> the work of the merchant too is 'labor;' so is the work of the landowner, for that matter, insofar as he too is engaged in commerce. Thus the effect of understanding Locke's account of labor in terms of its fulfillment of a teleology of natural resources is to strip specifically manual labor of the unique, originating role in the production of value that the early paragraphs of chapter 5 appear to grant it. What differentiates manual labor from other areas of commercial activity is the moral significance ascribed to it by scripture, which provides Locke with his starting point. Locke's rhetorical strategy in his chapter on property, then, is to use 'labor' as a synecdoche for commerce, so that the moral meaning of plowing and reaping can be extended to trading and banking as well.[44]

[41] Irvine, p. 964.

[42] Ibid., pp. 964–65.

[43] Ibid., p. 965.

[44] Ibid., p. 971.

The move from labour as *manual* labour, which justifies the ownership of individual plots of land workable by an individual or family, to labour 'as a synecdoche for commerce,' allows Locke to get around the moral provisos which had earlier complicated the justification of property accumulation.

This detour through Locke demonstrates the centrality of labour to the earlier thinker's justification even of property *accumulation*, but it is also important to note another consequence of Locke's discourse: his general levelling of all labour. Locke's expansion of the concept essentially rids it of any qualitative distinction; the mere existence of labour explains and justifies the enclosure of land as property. This flattening will bear an important role as I turn back to Wordsworth's *Guide*: I will trace through the text the general relationship (*Nature — [Labour] → Property*) identified in Locke, and then Wordsworth's own movement from explanation to justification. I will argue that Wordsworth, in adopting a Burkean discourse of 'natural processes,' rejects Locke's flattening of labour, reintroducing qualitative distinctions which allow him to rhetorically strip property accumulation of its Lockean justification.

'A Disagreeable Speck': Larches, Land, and Labour

Wordsworth seems, when explaining the origins of the various historical property forms he observes in the Lakes – meaning primarily feudal and post-feudal (customary) tenantries, as well as individual hillside smallholdings – to appeal to what I have identified as the Lockean relationship between nature and property, as mediated by labour. This relationship reappears even in discussions of feudal or patriarchal assignment of property – the distribution of this property by the patriarch in question is always justified by labour productivity:

> These sub-tenements were judged sufficient for the support of so many families; and no further division was permitted. These divisions and sub-divisions were convenient at the time for which they were calculated: the land, so parcelled out, was, of necessity more attended to, and the industry greater, when more persons were to be supported by the produce of it.[45]
>
> […] so, while the valley was thus lying open, enclosures seem to have taken place upon the sides of the mountains, because the land there was not intermixed,

[45] William Wordsworth, *Guide to the Lakes*, p. 42.

> and was of little comparative value; and, therefore, small opposition would be made to its being appropriated by those to whose habitations it was contiguous. Hence the singular appearance which the sides of many of these mountains exhibit, intersected, as they are, almost to the summit, with stone walls.[46]
>
> We have thus seen a numerous body of Dalesmen creeping into possession of their home-steads, their little crofts, their mountain-enclosures; and, finally, the whole vale is visibly divided; except, perhaps, here and there some marshy ground, which, till fully drained, would not repay the trouble of enclosing.[47]

Three different property forms and periods are analysed here, and in each, we can see productivity – the application of labour – take on an explanatory role in this account of origins.

The justificatory aspect of Locke's discourse on property is also present in the *Guide*, however, and it reaches its greatest prominence in Section Third, 'Changes, and Rules of Taste for Preventing Their Bad Effects.' The term 'changes' keys us into Wordsworth's project here: throughout Section Third, he considers several alternate property types either traditional to or emergent in the Lakes, and judges whether or not their presence – or their replacement of older forms – can be justified. These property types are smallholdings on the one hand, and on the other hand those which can broadly be considered kinds of property accumulation: consolidations of smallholdings, touristic property, industrial property (or 'vegetable manufactories'), and gentlemen's estates.[48] I hold that Wordsworth's justificatory discourse does repeat the basic schema of Locke's, in which the presence of labour becomes a means of judging the acceptability of a given form of property, but Wordsworth makes some important changes – unflattening Locke's expanded labour – particularly in his discussion of arboricultural estates in the Lakes.

This discussion raises what appears to be a rather sensitive topic for Wordsworth: the introduction of the larch tree to the Lake District. The passage concerning larches departs from the general tone of the *Guide*, growing increasingly splenetic as the pages turn and displaying an odd aggression towards the tree itself, as well as towards its

[46] Ibid., p. 43.

[47] Ibid., p. 44.

[48] Ibid., in order: pp. 67; 55; 46, 61; 55–58.

advocates. This rant is presented, within the *Guide* and within much commentary upon it, as a purely aesthetic concern: Section Third is suffused with aesthetic concerns and language, and the larch rant is preceded by a passage on the application of picturesque principles to the landscape, in which the presence of white buildings is taken to 'destro[y] the gradations of distance.'[49] There are nods towards less superficial oppositions to the tree's presence – the question of how well larches would actually grow in such conditions – but, in truth, these seem fairly perfunctory when read alongside the venomous diatribe which comprises the majority of the passage, a diatribe which *does* remain aesthetic in scope:

> It must be acknowledged that the larch, till it has outgrown the size of a shrub, shows, when looked at singly, some elegance in form and appearance, especially in spring, decorated, as it then is, by the pink tassels of its blossoms; but, as a tree, it is less than any other pleasing: its branches (for *boughs* it has none) have no variety in the youth of the tree, and little dignity, even when it attains its full growth; *leaves* it cannot be said to have, consequently neither affords shade nor shelter. In spring the larch becomes green long before the native trees; and its green is so peculiar and vivid, that, finding nothing to harmonize with it, wherever it comes forth, a disagreeable speck is produced. In summer, when all other trees are in their pride, it is of a dingy lifeless hue; in autumn of a spiritless unvaried yellow, and in winter it is still more lamentably distinguished from every other deciduous tree of the forest, for they seem only to sleep, but the larch appears absolutely dead.[50]

One can see why Hess would describe this passage as 'based on cultural and aesthetic rather than ecological grounds, with little sense of environmental effects or consequences.'[51] In the full passage, Wordsworth more explicitly positions the larch within specific aesthetic discourses: for Wordsworth, monocultures of larch cannot attain the scale necessary to be sublime, nor the uniformity necessary to compose neat units of picturesque design.[52] On the kind of scale possible in the Lake District, '[t]he

[49] Ibid., p. 60. Wordsworth attributes this idea to William Gilpin. For the picturesque and the idea of gradations of distance, see Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place, 1730-1840*, pp. 9–10.

[50] Wordsworth, p. 64.

[51] Hess, p. 95.

[52] For the sublimity of expansive larch forests, see Wordsworth, p. 65.

terminating spike renders it impossible that the several trees, where planted in numbers, should ever blend together so as to form a mass or masses of wood,' those concluding units being drawn from the language of picturesque landscape design.[53] Likewise, its unsuitability for mixed forests is expressed in the passage above as a lack of visual harmony. Larches are thus impossible to position within a picturesque landscape, Wordsworth complains, adopting the kind of aerial and compositional viewpoint that John Barrell associates with the Claudian picturesque.[54] The kind of ownership entailed by this viewpoint is not one of stewardship, nor one concerned at a more than superficial level with the physical interactions between entities that comprise an ecosystem; rather, it is a viewpoint which seeks to organise, to make readable, a landscape which resists that very picturesque organisation.[55] Implicit in this viewpoint, Barrell suggests, is the idea that 'one must control nature in order not to be controlled by it.'[56]

Hess would go further: in Wordsworth's case, he is not just wrestling for control with nature, but with rival tastes.[57] Throughout Section Third, Wordsworth pits his particular version of the picturesque against the more evidently constructed landscapes of the wealthy landowners, and in the larch rant in particular, this picturesque aesthetic appears to be set against aesthetic 'signs of human industry and ownership.'[58] But this rhetorical struggle does not entirely take place on the plane of aesthetics. Nicholas Mason has recently shown that larch plantations, particularly in the Lake District, carried important political and economic valences which can shift a reading of the passage away from the 'unpleasantly intrusive aesthetic effects' of the larch towards the labour involved in this kind of industrial use of the landscape.[59]

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[53] Hess, p. 95.

[54] Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place, 1730-1840*, pp. 6, 7–8, esp. 25.

[55] Ibid., p. 26.

[56] Ibid., p. 24.

[57] Hess, pp. 94–95. Hess does not cite, but certainly parallels, Tim Fulford's exceptional reading of Wordsworth's competition for rhetorical authority over landscape in *Landscape, Liberty, and Authority: Poetry, Criticism, and Politics from Thomson to Wordsworth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

[58] Hess., p. 96.

[59] Ibid., p. 95.

The introduction of the larch tree to Britain in the early eighteenth century had come, by the time of the Napoleonic Wars, to be seen as a response to 'a scarcity of oak timber for the use of the navy.'[60] In the context of this national need,

> [d]riven by a desire to create vast intergenerational wealth and the conviction that they were serving the greater good, a band of leading Cumbrian landowners led by the renowned Whig prelate Richard Watson, Bishop of Llandaff, set about converting the fells of Westmorland into an industrial-scale experiment in commercial forestry,

planting millions of larches across various estates and enclosed waste lands in the name of an ideology of Whig improvement.[61] Larches were a perfectly emblematic 'improvement' crop: encouraged by reports of its successful commercial growth in Italy and Russia,[62] for instance, and by 'flattering promises from the speedy growth of this tree,'[63] improvers like Watson and his 'local acolyte[s]'[64] insisted on planting larches 'in rich soils and sheltered situations' where they were like to grow 'full of sap and of little value,'[65] in defiance of traditional practices and of the constraints of the land. The ideology of improvement, then, was one of mastery over the landscape and over nature through which, like Claudian composition, one could 'control nature in order not to be controlled by it.'

This ideology was not one held by, or indeed for, smallholders: when Watson asserted 'that individual landowners could "do much more towards perfecting the

[60] Richard Watson, Bishop of Llandaff, 'Preliminary Observations by the Bishop of Llandaff', in *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Westmorland, with Observations on the Means of Its Improvement*, by Andrew Pringle (Edinburgh: Chapman and Company, 1794), pp. 7–15 (p. 14). For the influence of the Napoleonic Wars on agriculture and 'improvement' in Westmorland more generally, see Ian Whyte, '"Wild, Barren and Frightful" – Parliamentary Enclosure in an Upland County: Westmorland 1767–1890', *Rural History*, 14.1 (2003), 21–38.

[61] Nicholas Mason, 'Larches, Llandaff, and Forestry Politics in Wordsworth's Guide to the Lakes', *Studies in Romanticism*, 61.3 (2022), 429–60 (p. 429). Mason offers a more detailed history of larch growing in Britain and specifically in Westmorland on pages 432–5.

[62] Watson, p. 9.

[63] Wordsworth, p. 61.

[64] Mason, p. 441.

[65] Wordsworth, p. 61.

agriculture of the kingdom" than any official committee,'[66] he was not referring to landowners in general, but to a particular type of landowner: those who possessed estates, or accumulations of land (often enclosed).[67] 'Like many modern-day frackers, clear-cutters, and strip-miners,' Mason writes, 'Watson firmly believed that the industrial-scale extraction of natural resources could be simultaneously self-enriching and a societal boon.'[68] This scale is one which required a large labour force beyond the resources of the minor landowner or the tenant farmer, as well as newly developed techniques. The need to make these enormous plots of land economically viable as 'vegetable manufactories' thus forced landowners to shift – just as in Locke – from manual labour to white-collar forms, in this case both economic and scientific.

The narrative of improvement, then, was a kind of intellectual georgic: while those who worked the land could be dismissed as unthinking beasts, the oxen drawing the plough,[69] the daily *negotium* of the georgic could be transferred to 'the literate and progressive tenantry,'[70] the 'gentleman farmer,'[71] whose theoretical, managerial, and scientific labour entered into the classic georgic struggle against the 'difficulties and predations' of nature,[72] portrayed as timeless but often raised by the scale at which their agriculture was being practiced. In 'the eighteenth-century tradition of georgic poetry,' according to David Fairer, 'this primal element of recalcitrance – Nature's tendency to pull against human life – provides a resistant energy to drive effort and ingenuity – mental as much as physical,'[73] and this association of 'ingenuity' and progress with a kind of *overcoming* of nature allowed for the lionisation of such scientific agriculturalists as Lord Kaimes, Richard Watson,[74] and Humphry Davy – who

[66] Ibid.

[67] Barrell expands this to encompass the 'rural professional class,' typically independent, mobile, and unconnected to a particular smallholding (pp. 65–6).

[68] Mason, p. 440.

[69] The image is taken from John Christian Curwen, *Hints on Agricultural Subjects and on the Best Means of Improving the Condition of the Labouring Classes*, Second Edition (J. Johnson, St. Paul's Churchyard, 1809), p. xi, University of Edinburgh Special Collections, S.B. .63(42073)Cur.

[70] Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place, 1730-1840*, p. 69.

[71] Curwen, p. xvi.

[72] David Fairer, 'The Pastoral-Georgic Tradition', in *William Wordsworth in Context*, ed. by Andrew Bennett, Literature in Context (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 111–18 (p. 111).

[73] Ibid.

[74] Kaimes and Watson are named in Curwen's panegyric to the 'gentleman farmer' (pp. xvi–xvii).

could write in 1802 that the farmer's 'exertions are profitable and useful to society, in proportion as he is more of a chemical philosopher.'[75] Despite this rhetoric, though, science cannot plant trees, and so the scientific labour of the landowners flowed downwards, changing the manual labour practices carried out on the ground. The larches were thus planted in unsuitable soil,[76] and planted incredibly densely in an attempt both to improve yields and to counter the hillside exposure of the trees, prone to bend their already 'sinuous' trunks,[77] an effort which required owners to clear the land of rocks and undergrowth. In a more explicitly scientific vein, Mason informs us, some owners 'performed gruesome experiments with young larches to see if its naturally sinuous trunks might yield longer and straighter planks if trained to grow horizontally.'[78] These 'gruesome experiments' carried out upon the larches sum up the kind of labour that was being performed under the aegis of Whig improvement, labour which fought against the constraints of nature – constraints understood as a general 'recalcitrance' – in a georgic drama of resistance and progress.

Wordsworth's antipathy to the results of such 'improving' labour are clear. But I believe that there is, in the *Guide*, a more direct critique of this kind of labour itself, primarily through his identification of an opposing form of labour. This is illustrated in a passage a few pages along in which Wordsworth explains the natural process by which trees are planted:

> Seeds are scattered indiscriminately by winds, brought by waters, and dropped by birds. They perish, or produce, according as the soil and situation upon which they fall are suited to them: and under the same dependence, the seedling or the sucker, if not cropped by animals, (which Nature is often careful to prevent by fencing it about with brambles or other prickly shrubs) thrives, and the tree grows, sometimes single, taking its own shape without constraint, but for the

[75] Humphry Davy, 'A Discourse Introductory to a Course of Lectures on Chemistry', 1802 <https://knarf.english.upenn.edu/Davy/davy2dis.html> [accessed 14 January 2024].

[76] As I have already noted, Wordsworth acknowledges this. It is confirmed, in reality, by the fact that, after the first wave of larch plantations were felled for use, very few were replanted, such that one would be hard pressed to imagine today the vast swathes of this tree that once dominated the inner dales.

[77] Mason, p. 434.

[78] Ibid.

> most part compelled to conform itself to some law imposed upon it by its neighbours. From low and sheltered places, vegetation travels upward to the more exposed; and the young plants are protected, and to a certain degree fashioned, by those that have preceded them. The continuous mass of foliage which would thus be produced, is broken by rocks, or by glades or open places, where the browzing of animals has prevented the growth of wood. As vegetation ascends, the winds begin also to bear their part in moulding the forms of the trees; but, thus mutually protected, trees, though not of the hardiest kind, are enabled to climb high up on the mountain. Gradually, however, by the quality of the ground, and by increasing exposure, a stop is put to their ascent; the hardy trees only are left: those also, by little and little, give way – and a wild and irregular boundary is established, graceful in its outline, and never contemplated without some feeling, more or less distinct, of the powers of Nature by which it is imposed.[79]

The final sentence of this passage falls neatly in line with the aesthetic discourse identified by Hess; a Hessian reading, as it were, could likely subsume the passage in its entirety to that aesthetic moment, a description of 'the powers of Nature' which culminate in this aesthetically pleasing treeline. Indeed, the passage is introduced as a means to 'justify our condemnation' of the aesthetically poor larch plantations, and it is followed by a lament for the inability of 'artificial planters' to replicate the *effects* of nature.[80] This explicitly aesthetic context sits uneasily, then, alongside the fact that this is one of the few sections of the *Guide to the Lakes* in which Wordsworth approaches a genuinely ecological position: the connection of a spacious, random planting of trees and 'the browzing of animals' reflects, whether intentionally or not, contemporary awareness of the delicate ecosystem supported by a forest's busy, varied undergrowth. To remove this passage from its largely aesthetic context would rob it of any significance except as an uncanny premonition. But this does not mean condemnation. Rather, I believe that an alternate reading can be found in the weight given to *process* in the quoted passage, as it is balanced against the weight given to *result*, a reading in

[79] Wordsworth, p. 63.

[80] Ibid., pp. 63–4.

which Wordsworth is also concerned with techniques, methods, and processes (natural and laborious) in general and *in and of themselves*.

When we return this passage to its context – both in terms of the larch rant and in terms of the ideology of improvement with which the rant is in dialogue – we see attention paid to precisely the natural constraints that the larch-improvers sought to overcome: the suitability of the soil, mentioned both at the start of the passage and again at the end, as Wordsworth rhetorically moves up the side of the mountain; the production of 'glades or open places' by the inconsistency of seed distribution and the presence of rocks, which may also be connected to the ability of a tree to 'tak[e] its own shape without constraint,' endowed with the space to grow outwards as well as directly upwards; and the natural distribution of trees according to height.

I am not the first to note this focus on natural processes. Nicholas Mason, in identifying in Wordsworth's 'Rules for Taste' 'the language and logic of Burkean conservatism,'[81] draws an important connection to what Burke calls, in a discussion of the development of the British constitution, 'the method of nature:'[82]

> You will observe, that from Magna Charta to the Declaration of Right, it has been the uniform policy of our constitution to claim and assert our liberties, as an *entailed inheritance* derived to us from our forefathers, and to be transmitted to our posterity; as an estate specially belonging to the people of this kingdom without any reference to any other more general or prior right. […]
>
> This policy appears to me to be the result of profound reflection; or rather the happy effect of following nature, which is wisdom without reflection, and above it. A spirit of innovation is generally the result of a selfish temper and confined views. People will not look forward to posterity, who never look backward to their ancestors. Besides, the people of England well know, that the idea of inheritance furnishes a sure principle of conservation, and a sure principle of transmission; without at all excluding a principle of improvement.[83]

[81] Mason, p. 446.

[82] Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. by L. G. Mitchell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 34.

[83] Ibid., p. 33, emphasis in original.

Several elements of this quote from Burke's 1790 *Reflections on the Revolution in France* have gone on to provide the backbone to Katey Castellano's important reading of Burke's, and by extension Wordsworth's, conservative ethos of conservation,[84] his use of the language of land ('entailed inheritance,' 'estate'), and his concern for 'inheritance' leading towards an ethos of 'intergenerational responsibility,'[85] developed by Wordsworth as an 'intergenerational imagination.'[86] It is not this particular attitude or 'imagination,' however, that I wish to highlight in Burke and in the *Guide*. Rather, I see in both a kind of translation in which the 'method of nature' – in Burke a socio-historical process which occurs at a scale beyond individual agency, in the social forces of 'second nature,'[87] and in Wordsworth the processes by which forests are naturally propagated[88] – is blurred into a *laborious* process.

Burke tends to present the appropriate laborious process through which government ought to be undertaken as a matter of 'following nature'[89] – the course he advocated in the previous quote – in her 'models and patterns of approved utility.' This is, as Castellano suggests in an instructive comparison of Burke and Paine on the question of obligation, a politics in praise of *constraint*:

> While Paine disregards an imaginary relation to future generations, Romantic conservatives [such as Burke] understand an imaginary connectedness to both past and future generations as a necessary prerequisite to right action and right relation to the environment.[90]

Castellano emphasises the extension of Paine's concept of liberty, within the *Rights of Man*, from an immediate liberty from despotism to a liberty first from the traditions,

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[84] Katey Castellano, 'Romantic Conservatism in Burke, Wordsworth, and Wendell Berry', *SubStance*, 40.2 (2011), 73–91 (pp. 73–4).

[85] Castellano, p. 75.

[86] Ibid., p. 73.

[87] Cf. James Chandler, *Wordsworth's Second Nature: A Study of the Poetry and Politics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

[88] I will thus refer both to the socio-historical processes with which Burke is concerned and the biological processes with which Wordsworth is concerned as 'natural processes,' emphasising their positions within each thinker's work as the counterpart to 'laborious processes,' processes carried out by humans.

[89] Cf. Burke, p. 61.

[90] Castellano, p. 77.

ideas, and processes of the past, and then from any obligations to future generations. 'The liberal individual comes into being,' Castellano writes, 'through a negative conception of freedom, a freedom from the moral obligations or political principles that might extend from one generation to the next.'[91] In contrast to this, then, Burke's idea of a good laborious process, in terms of government, is one constrained by obligations to future generations and by past ways of doing things in a given place.

It is worth briefly noting that in Burke, this following of constraint often tips over into a *complete* passivity: human labour in the sphere of government is essentially reduced to the mere facilitation of pre-existing natural processes. This is also a conclusion we may reach about ecological labour on reading the following passage from the *Guide*:

> Contrast the liberty that encourages, and the law that limits, this joint work of nature and time, with the disheartening necessities, restrictions, and disadvantages, under which the artificial planter must proceed, even he whom long observation and fine feeling have best qualified for the task. […] It is therefore impossible, under any circumstances, for the artificial planter to rival the beauty of nature.[92]

This may be an instinctively attractive model for an ecological labour, one in which nature is allowed to work freely, but I believe that Wordsworth's critique of improvement is more nuanced. Section Third of the *Guide* is concerned with a landscape in which natural processes, such as the natural propagation of woods, have already been disrupted; they are no longer running the show. Wordsworth emphasises that the larch growers are 'thrusting every other tree out of the way, to make room for their favourite;'[93] he is concerned in his 'Rules of Taste' to address the 'scenes [which] have been injured by what has been taken from them,' and the 'harsh *additions* that have been made.'[94] It is a manmade landscape with which Wordsworth is concerned, and in this sense, his project is not dissimilar to the contemporary project of 'rewilding:' the desired results are certainly different, but in each case, an emphasis is placed on

[91] Ibid.

[92] Wordsworth, pp. 63–4.

[93] Ibid., p. 61.

[94] Ibid., p. 65.

the role of laborious processes (Wordsworth's conscientious, if picturesque, planting) in undoing inappropriate or harmful changes to the landscape, correcting the perverted course of the landscape's natural processes. The active intervention of human labour is still necessary.

What this passage (and the *Guide* as a whole) emphasises, then, is another instance of what Bruce Graver identifies in 'Michael' as 'the limitations of georgic values,'[95] or the limitations of the 'learned control of nature, embodied in the unceasing toil' of Michael, Wordsworth's 'ideal georgic shepherd.'[96] In 'Michael,' this limit is found in the adult dissolution of Luke, raised into the georgic labour of his father. In the *Guide*, it is found in the limits Wordsworth rhetorically imposes on the potential of laborious processes which are pitched against nature, which engage in the contrast between innovative labour and a 'recalcitrant' nature found in the georgic narrative of improvement, and which seek to *overcome* the 'necessities, restrictions, and disadvantages' imposed by nature. In place of such a labour Wordsworth does not propose a lapse into passive *otium*, nature being pitched as uncorrupted and self-sustaining;[97] rather, he proposes a different kind of active labour: one which embraces the Burkean form of constraint I have outlined above. As I will argue more fully in the next section, just as a nation's history ought to constrain the labour of its government for Burke, for Wordsworth good laborious processes are constrained *by the particularities of a given landscape*.

Smallholding Labour and Natural Constraints

To demonstrate this, I would like to turn now to Wordsworth's positive depictions of human labour. At this point, the context of the *Guide* as a geographical text – or, to follow the 1822 title, as *A* Description *of the Lakes* – begins to preclude the *direct* depiction of labour; one can work back, however, from the appearances which are described to understand the labourious processes behind them, and one can do this most easily in the depictions of the traditional (according to Wordsworth, at least)

[95] Bruce E. Graver, 'Wordsworth's Georgic Pastoral Otium and Labor in "Michael"', *European Romantic Review*, 1.2 (1991), 119–34 (p. 119).

[96] Ibid., p. 127.

[97] Wordsworth was not prone to such a depiction of nature even in poems labelled as 'pastoral.' See Graver, pp. 124–5; 128.

smallholdings of the region. In turning to these depictions, I hope to solidify my reading of Wordsworth's constrained labour, but I also wish to return this discussion of labour to its original context in the *Guide*'s justificatory discourse: for Wordsworth, distinct types of labour emerge from distinct forms of property, and thus serve as a means to justify – or not – their existence.

The labour associated with smallholdings has, in Wordsworth's description of it, a tendency towards the gradual and the varied. The gradual nature of smallholding labour – slow production, based on requirement and emergent necessity – can be seen in Wordsworth's description of the production of ever-smaller churches through the inner vales, a non-agricultural form of labour, certainly, but still one associated with the smallholding way of life:

> Chapels, daughters of some distant mother church, are first erected in the more open and fertile vales, as those of Bowness and Grasmere, offsets of Kendal: which again, after a period, as the settled population increases, become mother-churches to smaller edifices, planted, at length, in almost every dale throughout the country.[98]

This scattering according to suitability and need is analogous, of course, to the naturally conditioned distribution of seeds we have already observed; further, we can note the familial and botanical language used to describe the relationships between the older and newer edifices. It is thus suggested that the 'smaller edifices, planted, at length, in almost every dale throughout the country,' grow naturally within the constraints of the image of their 'canonized forebears,'[99] the 'mother-churches'.[100] The cottages belonging to the region's smallholdings are also 'scattered over the vallies'[101] according to pre-existing constraints, these being natural: 'the several rocks and hills, which have been described as rising up like islands from the level area of the vale, have regulated the choice of the inhabitants in the situation of their dwellings.'[102] The construction of these cottages, too, follows natural guidance. They are kept low by the wind, are often

[98] Wordsworth, p. 43.

[99] Burke, p. 34.

[100] Wordsworth, p. 43.

[101] Ibid., p. 46.

[102] Ibid., p. 25.

'of the colour of the native rock, out of which they have been built,'[103] and their roofs are made of local slate which, being imperfectly split, allows nature to bed itself in in the form of 'lichens, mosses, ferns, and flowers.'[104] Materials, techniques, processes, and the interaction of the building with the landscape work within natural constraints. Even the white rough-cast that Wordsworth elsewhere in the guide decries as overly bright is allowed to be darkened and naturalised by time, wind, and rain.

While Wordsworth writes less about the agricultural labour of the smallholdings, his focus on common fields, intermixed and divided with existing 'stones, bushes or trees,'[105] produces yet another image of constraint: there is little attempt, in this depiction of smallholding labour, at mastery; where there is – in the enclosure of 'intermixed plots of ground in common field' with 'fences of alders, willows, and other trees,' for instance[106] – the use of existing, local materials, as in the construction of the cottages from 'native rock,' represents labour constrained by locality. Wordsworth's depiction of the other major form of labour carried out upon these smallholdings, however, will return us to the point I wish to make again about the *manner* in which Wordsworth depicts labour and property. The weaving and spinning activities which comprised the region's cottage industry are seen to emerge as a natural corollary of the smallholding as property form:

> The family of each man, whether *estatesman* or farmer, formerly had a twofold support; first, the produce of his lands and flocks; and secondly, the profit drawn from the employment of the women and children, as manufacturers; spinning their own wool in their own houses (work chiefly done in the winter season), and carrying it to market for sale.[107]

This labour emerges naturally from the conjunction of a surplus of wool, proper to the family-run smallholding, with a seasonal constraint on growth and harvesting which opens up the time to deal with said surplus. This movement can be generalised throughout the *Guide to the Lakes*: particular forms of labour, in the positive as well as the negative, are associated with particular forms of property. Just as the accumulation

[103] Ibid., p. 46.

[104] Ibid., p. 47.

[105] Ibid., p. 43.

[106] Ibid., p. 44.

[107] Ibid., p. 67.

of land is associated, in the georgic narrative of rural improvement, with scientific forms of labour which act against the constraints of a 'recalcitrant' nature, Wordsworth himself associates smallholdings with labour which is carried out within or even guided by those same constraints.

Conclusion: Wordsworth and the Seventeenth Century

Throughout this article, I have been following a certain direction of thought, repeatedly expressed through a right-facing arrow: *Nature — [Labour] → Property*. This framework has been traced through different aspects of Wordsworth's *Guide to the Lakes* in the form of both good and bad labour, which does or does not accept and work within the constraints of nature, and which can or cannot explain or justify the property forms to be found historically or contemporaneously in the Lake District. This, I have suggested, is Wordsworth's inheritance from Locke, whether through the *Treatise* or through its vast influence on liberal thought through the eighteenth century.

But this is only one direction in which we can read this general framework, and the direction I have chosen was that most convenient for the sake of exegesis, of pulling out the general relationships that exist within the text. If we look at the framework from another direction – *Property → [Labour] → Nature* – then we begin to draw out another seventeenth century influence visible throughout the *Guide*. It is an influence which has already manifested itself through this article, in fact: in my repeated insistence on the importance of *constraint* to Wordsworth's good labour, I have pointed towards a relevant vocabulary drawn from seventeenth-century Republican discourse. Wordsworth's Republican inheritance was identified as early as Z. S. Fink's 1948 'Wordsworth and the English Republican Tradition,' and Fink's analysis has been developed through David Simpson's *Wordsworth's Historical Imagination*, Tim Fulford's *Landscape, Liberty and Authority*, and Philip Connell's 'Wordsworth's "Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty" and the British Revolutionary Past.' Fink's explanation of the general sense of Republicanism – meaning, here, the political thought of John Milton, James Harrington, and Algernon Sydney, among others – remains succinct and accurate:

> Perhaps the most striking single consideration about the whole problem is the fact that all of these men, approaching the matter perhaps from somewhat different angles, share with Wordsworth a common concern for compensating

> for the defects of human nature by the contrivances of government. Human nature being either imperfect or subject to corruption and degeneration, they display an endeavor to contrive the institutions of the state so that "all corrupt means to aspire" will be prevented. This was considered essential, in the interest not only of promoting individual morality, but of preserving the health of the state.[108]

Hence my focus on the term *constraint*: Republicanism is a political idea based around the 'equation of civic virtue with some form of social constraint.'[109] For earlier Republicans in Florence and Venice, in the words of J. G. A. Pocock, 'the highest form of active life was that of the citizen who, having entered the political process in pursuit of his particular good, now found himself joining with others to direct the actions of all in pursuit of the good of all;'[110] the ownership of property was held to constrain one to 'the full austerity of citizenship in the classical sense,'[111] warding off the corruption of self-interest or dependence.

The critics who have read Wordsworth in light of this influence have seen Wordsworth's adoption of it as more or less altered and mediated. Philip Connell, for instance, identifies a Republican vocabulary caught up in the contemporary discourse around the historical meanings of England's seventeenth-century revolutions, which are used to point up the shortcomings of Foxite responses to the Peace of Amiens;[112] for Simpson, Wordsworth adopts the political ideals of the Republicans more literally, but 'not so much in laws (although he does not discredit laws) as in creative habits bred by experience and environment.'[113] I tend to cleave closer to Fink's reading, which sees Wordsworth as a conscious and aware political thinker who draws, at various points in his life, on Republican ideals. In this sense, I would reverse Simpson's formulation, where Wordsworth adopts the idea of social constraint as leading to political virtue, but sees

[108] Z. S. Fink, 'Wordsworth and the English Republican Tradition', *The Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, 47.2 (1948), 107–26 (p. 115).

[109] Simpson, p. 61.

[110] J. G. A. Pocock, 'Civic Humanism and Its Role in Anglo-American Thought', in *Politics, Language, and Time* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989), 80–103 (p. 86).

[111] Ibid., p. 91.

[112] Philip Connell, 'Wordsworth's "Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty" and the British Revolutionary Past', *English Literary History*, 85.3 (2018), 747–74 (passim.).

[113] Simpson, p. 61.

that constraint as more varied and environmental. Rather, I see Wordsworth as deeply concerned with *property* as a form of constraint, but which constrains individuals in both political and non-political ways. Turning back to the Lockean framework which I have now reversed – *Property → Labour → Nature* – we may now begin to see in full clarity the broader pattern of constraint evident throughout the *Guide*: specific forms of property constrain their owners to specific kinds of labour, and thus to specific kinds of relationships to the land which comprises that property.

The term which naturally associates itself with this line of thought, particularly within the context of republicanism, is *virtue*: just as property ownership conferred a kind of political virtue (through the independence it facilitated), so specific property forms, in this understanding of the *Guide*, constrain one to virtuous or unvirtuous relations with the land. This language of virtue provides a neat takeaway from Wordsworth's text, but it also brings it into a kind of dialogue – limited, certainly, and requiring a great deal of interpretive work – with the broader political thought of the early part of the long nineteenth century. As Gregory Claeys notes, the language of republicanism 'either disappeared in this period or adopted quite different forms:'[114] across the radical–conservative spectrum can be identified, in a variety of forms, a range of theories which associate various configurations of land and property with virtue, from advocacy of an agrarian law in James Burgh to the more Wordsworthian emphasis on parish administration of land revenue in Thomas Spence.[115] In this context, the reversal of Locke's formulation may be seen as a means of understanding the ecological potential not only of Wordsworth's land politics, but of the many and varied considerations of land and property that suffused the political climate of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

Wordsworth's reorientation of Republican political ideas towards the relationship between landowners (and by extension those who work on that land) and the landscape itself may also offer us, then, a novel framework with which to understand

[114] Gregory Claeys, 'The Origins of the Rights of Labor: Republicanism, Commerce, and the Construction of Modern Social Theory in Britain, 1796-1805', *The Journal of Modern History*, 66.2 (1994), 249–90 (p. 250); see also Mark Philp, *Reforming Ideas in Britain: Politics and Language in the Shadow of the French Revolution, 1789-1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), especially ch. 4.

[115] Ibid., pp. 253–4. Here I must thank Dr Alison Morgan for bringing Thomas Spence to my attention following the conference version of this article and apologise for my utterly inadequate answer to her question.

and evaluate current concerns around ecology and land ownership. This relationship is an extremely urgent one, particularly here and now in Scotland: on March 23, 2024, the Scottish land reform campaigner Andy Wightman released his latest survey of 'Who Owns Scotland,' revealing that '83% of rural Scotland is owned by private entities (individuals, companies, trusts etc.),' and that '[t]he ownership of privately-owned rural land has become more concentrated since 2012 as a result of existing owners acquiring more land.'[116] This concentration has always been characteristic of land ownership patterns in Scotland,[117] but it has now led to new considerations about property types and sizes. The Land Reform (Scotland) Bill 2024 proposes the institution of 'lotting' – the breaking up of estates which are being sold into smaller parcels[118] – but Wightman 'has encountered another investment firm trying to buy 14 properties covering nearly 6,000 hectares, none of which would meet the lotting threshold.'[119] 200 years later, the problem of rural property accumulation rumbles on.

This is often framed as a political problem, but it can also be understood as an ecological one. Take, for instance, the problem of rewilding: the aforementioned investment firm, Gresham House, engages in forestry projects, marketed 'as tax-efficient investments' (Carrell b).[120] Other rewilding projects are funded (and, importantly, made profitable) by the sale of carbon units and pending issuance units:[121]

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[116] Andy Wightman, *Who Owns Scotland 2024: A Preliminary Analysis, Who Owns Scotland* (Who Owns Scotland, 23 March 2024), p. 1 <https://andywightman.scot/docs/WOS_2024_PRELIM_v2.pdf>.

[117] Ibid., p. 4.

[118] Severin Carrell, 'Scottish Lairds May Be Forced to Break up Estates during Land Sales', *The Guardian*, 14 March 2024, section UK news <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/mar/14/scottish-lairds-may-be-forced-to-break-up-estates-during-land-sales> [accessed 6 April 2024].

[119] Severin Carrell, 'Land Ownership in Rural Scotland More Concentrated despite Reforms, Study Finds', *The Guardian*, 23 March 2024, section UK news <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/mar/23/land-ownership-in-rural-scotland-more-concentrated-despite-reforms-study-finds> [accessed 6 April 2024].

[120] It is worth noting in contrast that the philosophy of rewilding expressed by one of Britain's most successful projects, Knepp Castle Estate, is closer to my reading of Wordsworth: 'Knepp's ethos is to enable natural processes instead of aiming for any particular goals or outcomes.' See 'Knepp Castle Estate Rewilding Project', *Rewilding Britain* <https://www.rewildingbritain.org.uk/rewilding-projects/knepp-castle-estate> [accessed 20 March 2024].

[121] 'Carbon Units Explained', *CarbonStore* <https://carbonstoreuk.com/the-carbon-codes/carbon-units-explained/> [accessed 9 August 2024].

just as larch growth needed to be sped up to make large properties profitable in the Romantic era, so in 2024 projects like the restoration of Cashel Forest's adjoining peatland are being pushed and sped up beyond natural constraints to make good on the sale of PUIs.[122]

If we approach this question in light of Wordsworth's land-Republicanism, we may well ask whether land owned as an investment can allow for the kind of labour which embraces natural constraints, rather than mastery of the land. An answer to this question does not fall within the scope of this article, but it should point, I hope, to the *kind* of ecological potential latent in Wordsworth's *Guide*, a potential inherent in its political and economic thought, and a potential which can exist alongside the aestheticising discourse which has previously been taken to characterise its contributions to ecology. This approach can offer those of us convinced by Scott Hess and others' rigorous critiques new ways to appreciate Wordsworth's lifelong poetic obsession with nature and land, and ways for us to continue learning from his work.

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[122] Nick Kempe, 'The Proposed Sell-off of the Cashel Forest - How the Lomond & Trossachs National Park Authority Is Serving Private Interests', *Parkswatchscotland*, 2024 <https://parkswatchscotland.co.uk/2024/08/06/the-proposed-sell-off-of-the-cashel-forest-how-the-lomond-trossachs-national-park-authority-is-serving-private-interests/> [accessed 9 August 2024]; Nick Kempe, 'Cashing in on Cashel - the £4m Sale of the Forest for a Thousand Years', *Parkswatchscotland*, 2024 <https://parkswatchscotland.co.uk/2024/07/03/cashing-in-on-cashel-the-4m-sale-of-the-forest-for-a-thousands-years/> [accessed 9 August 2024].