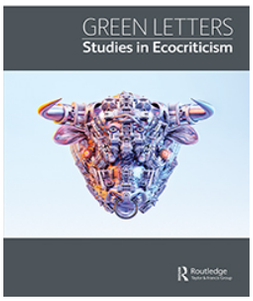

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Anna Burton

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'Tree Mountaineers': Arboreal Materiality on the Fells in the Lakeland Guides of William Wordsworth and Harriet Martineau

Anna Burton

Department of Humanities, College of Arts, Humanities and Education, University of Derby, Derby, UK

ABSTRACT

This ascending line of enquiry will pay close attention to how, through their nineteenth-century Lakeland writings, William Wordsworth and Harriet Martineau attached meaning to the continued presence and perceived role of trees in the landscapes of the English Lake District. The authors wrote about the region when increased numbers of landowners were planting trees for aesthetic, agricultural, and financial purposes on their land, ranging from the villa garden to the fell-side plantation. In this context, this analysis will consider the authors' perceptions of historical upland tree cover, their aesthetic evaluation of particular planted and self-seeded spaces, and how individual specimens are sites of natural and cultural convergence shaped by the 'wildness' of the fells. Focusing on literary Lakeland trees – as discussed by Wordsworth, Martineau, and their circle – this article illustrates an ecological and arbori-cultural understanding of the environment that shifts, in accordance with elevation, from the valley floor up to the mountain top.

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Introduction

In 'A Year at Ambleside' (1850), Harriet Martineau records in detail how she planted out the environs of her newly built home, The Knoll, in Ambleside. Tree species were given particular attention; Martineau notes that she planted evergreens that would 'cheer the eye in winter', lime trees for bees, and 'thorns and hollies' for the garden birds (Martineau 2002, 61). In creating an 'orchard slope' on the higher ground, she reflected on the soil conditions and was concerned about how the trees would cope in the 'shallow soil' there (2002, 62). When William Wordsworth agreed to plant a tree in the garden at her request, the pair 'selected a vigorous little stone pine, and off he went'; Martineau continues to state that then the 'little tree was a daily anxiety for some time' as she was unsure whether it would thrive in the situation in which it was placed (2002, 63, 64). Wordsworth was a keen tree planter within and beyond this

CONTACT Anna Burton A.Burton@derby.ac.uk Department of Humanities, College of Arts, University of Derby, Derby, UK

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region, and much like her peer, in this entry Martineau demonstrates a likeminded sensitivity to the planting of particular tree species in relation to the variety of microclimates within the localised and elevated topographies of the English Lake District. There is also a sense that she is perceptive to the personal and cultural associations attached to the stone pine in its being planted by a Wordsworthian hand. The writings and guides of these two 'Laker(s)' were central to the cultural formations of this area in the nineteenth century, and as this article puts forward, their responses to tree-places and arboreal cultivation in the region are notable records for how the perceptions, planting, and caretaking of trees were shaped in this mountainous and agro-pastoral setting (Martineau [1877] 2007, 471).

Owain Jones and Paul Cloke explore how trees and their materiality play an active role in the formation of environment in the cultural imagination, and how their physical circumstance can both shape place and is also shaped by place, respectively. This is a process that Jones and Cloke define as 'arbori-culture', and they foreground its importance by suggesting that:

> The processes by which trees become culturally meaningful will have significant implications for understanding how places and landscapes are imagined, and for processes of environmental management, where those working with trees will be continually confronting the complex symbolic and emotional freight attached to trees in any particular place. (2020, 22)

It is necessary to understand how we perceive and attach meaning to trees in different environments – their shape, situation, and characteristics – because it informs our ongoing perceptions and treatment of them, and the environment more widely. From a literary dimension, this analysis will build on the work of Jones and Cloke, and consider how tree-places at a high elevation are shaped by natural and cultural forces, and the 'complex' network of associations that are ascribed to them in their altitudinal arboreality. In 1869, John Muir defined a 'tree mountaineer' as any specimen that is seemingly content to live for 'more than a score of centuries' at a high altitude (2007, 119). In transplanting the concept from the Sierra Nevada to the Lake District mountain range – a site wherein the natural and cultural, and the human and non-human are in many ways already inextricably intertwined – this article considers the agricultural, aesthetic, and arbori-cultural significance of trees at increasing elevations on the fells in the nineteenth-century, as recorded in Wordsworth's *Guide Through the Lakes* (1835, fifth ed.) and Martineau's *Complete Guide to the English Lakes* ([1855] 1858).

When altitude increases, the terrain and trees on it are sites where human intervention becomes increasingly complicated by the impacts of a perceived 'wildness'. As Poetzch and Falke consider in *Wild Romanticism*, for Wordsworth in the *Guide*, 'wildness' is something that humans have nothing to do with:

> One can work with the wild—steering a plough along a seam of more yielding ground or moving a wild rose into the garden—and if the wildness of the rose or the dirt resists manipulation enough, then we can trace the boundary of where the wild begins, but the human role in this process is allowing wildness to manifest itself, not conceptually subsuming it. (2021, 7)

Building on an understanding of 'the boundary of where the wild begins', this analysis will explore how Wordsworth's and Martineau's works respond to the intersection of 'wild' and cultural influences that shape Lakeland trees, physically and imaginatively. Elevated trees in

themselves are not just a visual boundary at which 'wildness' makes itself manifest, but the 'tree mountaineer' becomes a corporeal configuration of a 'wildness' that surpasses human control and cultivation. Nature (in all senses of the word) does not just find a way here, it is moulded by the climatological and geological formations of the fells.

Trees on the fells: from the 'primitive' to the picturesque

In 1989, the Institute of Terrestrial Ecology published a collection of essays entitled, *Cumbrian Woodlands: Past, Present and Future*. Therein, R. G. H. Bunce makes the case that there 'is little doubt that heavy grazing pressure is the primary limiting factor of [arboreal] regeneration' (1989, 13). Elsewhere, K. J. Kirby and A. M. Whitbread suggest that whilst 'grazing and browsing animals' have, to a large extent, always been part of Cumbrian woodlands, recent high levels of 'stock use in relation to the area of wood available reduces the diversity of the ground flora, with a shift to grasses and away from broadleaved species. Sapling growth is also prevented' (1989, 41). As these statements indicate – and as popularised most recently through the writings of James Rebanks – we know that intensive farming practices have resulted in a loss of Lakeland biodiversity, arboreal and otherwise. This is not simply a case of tree-planting vs. farming but is a complex and often localised issue in the region. In their respective nineteenth-century guides to the Lake District, Wordsworth and Martineau demonstrate an early awareness of the historical, human, and agricultural impacts on upland forest cover.

In Wordsworth's *Guide Through the Lakes*, he suggests that, formerly, 'the whole country must have been covered with wood to a great height up to the mountains' and encourages his reader to imagine 'these narrow dales and mountain sides, choked up as they must have been with wood' ([1835] 1977, 43, 52). Wordsworth meditates on a very different version of the Lake District, one overwhelmingly characterised ('choked up', even) by trees, high up onto the fells. He then admits that, in his present moment, the 'beautiful traces' of these woodscapes (and 'the universal sylvan appearance the country') only exists in the form of 'native coppice-woods that have been protected by enclosures and also in the forest-trees and hollies, which, though disappearing fast, are yet scattered both over the enclosed and unenclosed parts of the mountains' ([1835] 1977, 43). Wordsworth states that the woodscapes of the area are fast 'disappearing' and only exist in a more limited sense in that moment. Nonetheless, it is only through longstanding enclosures that even coppiced woods still exist; any other kind of trees outside of man's influence are 'scattered' at intervals across the landscape. Wordsworth does not blame or condemn agricultural practices for this loss, in fact, it appears that man's intervention, cordoning off, and cultivation of trees is a primary reason for its remaining existence in some form.

In a similar movement in Martineau's *Complete Guide to the English Lakes*, the author reflects on the Cumbrian woodland of 'olden times'; through a primitivist lens she imagines the Roman 'pioneers felling the trees, and paving the way [on High Street], while the trembling natives cowered in the forest below' ([1855] 1858, 61, 36). Additionally, she discusses that same landscape after the Norse arrived in the tenth century: the shepherds 'browsing their flocks on the sprouts of the ash and the holly with which the uplands were then wooded, and [. . .] protecting the sheep from the wolves which haunted the thickets' (1858, 61). As Harriet Ritvo records, the Norse 'cleared woods in order to make farmsteads, and their cattle and sheep grazed the hills', and so for

the first time, 'people and livestock together consolidated the dramatic landscape of bare fells and long views' (2009, 32). Whilst Wordsworth and Martineau both depict a historical transition from heavily wooded fells and valleys to a more 'scattered' arboreal presence, Martineau connects this transition to human intervention by explicitly stating that it is a direct result of both 'felling' and 'browsing'.

Martineau then goes on to compare current farming practices with past depredations. For both authors, the Cumbrian woodlands of the past are vastly different to the treescapes that they go on to detail elsewhere in their guides, but for Martineau in particular, there is an admission that in the current moment agricultural practices have evolved for the better:

> [present-day shepherds] cherish the young hollies and ash, whose sprouts feed their flocks, thus providing a compensation in the future for the past destruction of the woods. Thus, while the general primitive aspect of the region remains, and its intensely rural character is little impaired, there is perhaps scarcely a valley in the district which looks the same from one half-century to another. (1858, 140)

Martineau concludes that shepherds and farmers take better care for the trees that 'feed their flocks', and through this even make up for the 'past destruction of the woods' that she previously outlined. These individuals are 'providing a compensation' and investing in the future of such woodlands. Martineau is intensely aware of the role of human intervention, and of how that intercession impacts on the treatment, shape, and longevity of the region's trees. Whilst the 'primitive aspect' and 'intensely rural character' remain, there is an awareness that this is an environment that changes 'from one half-century to another'. This is a landscape of arboreal change and fixity all at once; it is less heavily forested than in its primitive past, but various forms of woodland continue to exist and be cultivated therein.

The geological formation of the region is central to its arboreal character and caretaking, and to how and why trees are planted there. Trees provide a significant link between the valleys and higher ground, and mountainsides provide an additional terrain on which to plant trees for various purposes. Martineau makes note of the 'generations of men [who] plant their orchards on the slopes that connect the mountains with the levels of the valleys' ([1855] 1858, 140). The presence of trees on increasingly steeper ground provides a material connection between the lowlands and the uplands. Half a decade earlier, in a letter to a friend in 1801, Samuel Taylor Coleridge remarks that oak trees 'thrive uncommonly well & in very bleak & rocky places' of the Lakes (1956, 712). He continues to remark that this is important to those living off the land, as when corn crops fail, a plantation of oaks on the fells provide acorns on which, 'there might be 20 families maintained' (1956, 712). Coleridge claims that '[when] the Mountains are struck with drouth, the Valleys give Corn – when the Valleys are rotted with rain, the Mountains yield Acorns' (1956, 713). The planting of trees on mountainsides provides a necessary social function, and in extreme cases, prevents famine amongst the lower rural classes. Trees on the fells are important to a network of agro-pastoral ecosystems that occur at different altitudes and micro-climates from one valley to the next.

Wooded fells were also of aesthetic importance to the picturesque mode of observation that proliferated, and in many ways popularised these landscapes (and how they were described) in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In his tour of the region in

1772, William Gilpin refers to 'craggy mountains, thinly scattered over with trees', sides of mountains 'ornamented [in] the richest manner with wood', and 'woody promontories' from which the spectator could gain a pleasing view of the lakes themselves (2013, I, 143; II, 71, 75). Whilst coverage may be seen as 'scattered', trees are still key components within and framing devices for a picturesque Lakeland scene. Furthermore, the aesthetic value of particular species being planted on fells became bound up with an increasingly politicised discourse during the nineteenth century; and notably, when it came to the proliferation of one tree, the European larch.

In 1799, Coleridge noted that the 'whole huge tract [of Matterdale] is treeless', but half a century later, Martineau describes Great Mell Fell as the 'ugliest of hills, like a tumulus planted all over with larch' (Coleridge 1957, I:549; Martineau [1855] 1858, 106). The Matterdale fell is likened to a man-made burial mound rather than a natural formation of any significance; and it is the 'ugliest of hills', made worse by being planted over with larch trees. For Martineau, the specific kind of trees here reinforce, rather than alleviate, the unappealing aesthetic of this valley. A similar sentiment is echoed later in the *Complete Guide* when she describes the Langdale Pikes:

> 'The two huge peaks, that from some, other vale peer into this', are the Langdale Pikes; and very fine is the view of them from this wild and somewhat dreary hollow. Since the Excursion was written, large plantations of larch have arisen; but they do not much ameliorate the desolation of the place. (1858, 150)

Martineau notes how the environment has altered since even Wordsworth wrote about it in *The Excursion*, and such a change is also marked by the abundant presence of this particular tree. Similarly to her description of Matterdale, plantations of larches 'do not much ameliorate the desolation of' the Pikes; they do not enrich the visual impression of the landscape in the eyes of the spectator. Martineau's evaluation of the larch is undoubtedly a continuation of Wordsworth's famous consideration of these species in his *Guide*, wherein he writes against the inclusion of the larch and other exotic species in these environs.

Wordsworthian larches and higher ground

Wordsworth notes that certain 'trees have been introduced within these last 50 years, such as beeches, larches, limes, &c., and plantations of firs, seldom with advantage, and often with great injury to the appearance of the country' ([1835] 1977, 44). The author goes on to isolate the larch and criticise those who plant it 'not merely with a view to profit, but in many instances for the sake of ornament'; he is incredulous that such 'vegetable manufactory' is planted in the Lake District not just for timber but for aesthetic appreciation too ([1835] 1977, 82). Nor is this 'spiky tree' any better in a grouping, as it causes 'nothing but deformity' collectively (1977, 86). Whilst the historical felling and enclosing of trees has altered the woodscapes of the Lake District, it is the artificial introduction of the larch, a non-native species, that goes against the grain of working with the land for Wordsworth, and Martineau in turn.

Various critics have scrutinised Wordsworth's language of 'injury' and 'deformity' attributed to the larch. Ian H. Thompson contends that through such discourse 'he demonstrated a pre-ecological understanding of natural processes' and suggests that the author's comments signal a sensitivity to the ecosystem of the Lake District (2007,

199). Alternatively, Scott Hess sees Wordsworth's opposition as being 'not for ecological reasons, but because they [. . .] would violate his aesthetic construction of the Lake District' (2012, 96). Hess perceives such statements as asserting a kind of cultural authority over the Wordsworthian vision of the Lakeland landscape. There is a kind of intermediary between these critical perspectives in Andrew Hazucha's work, which puts forward that whilst the *Guide* should be read as an 'alarmist call for a more sustainable local ecology', it can also be seen as 'an exercise in nationalistic rhetoric' (2002, 71). For Hazucha, Wordsworth's statements show an awareness of his environment and the localised ecologies therein, but at the same time, there is evidence of a 'form of ecoxenophobia', a fear of non-native plants superseding native species (2002, 69). Katherine Bergren argues that in this instance, to focus 'on xenophobia and nationalism [. . .] is to construe Wordsworth's anxiety too narrowly: he is concerned with both the global and the international migration of plants' (2019, 150). Bergren concludes that Wordsworth is equally as concerned about plants moving from other parts of the United Kingdom and into the Lake District. What is central to all of these readings, and to the discussion in the *Guide* specifically, is that it was the placement of the tree that Wordsworth took issue with.

Wordsworth saw the larch as a somewhat unnecessary substitution for native broad-leaved species. However, through correspondence and consultations regarding the land and woodland purchases of John Marshall, a wealthy family acquaintance, Wordsworth developed his perspective on larch cultivation. After viewing the Duke of Athol's extensive planting in Scotland, Marshall wrote the following to Wordsworth:

> The larch thrives in all dry situations, and thrives most in high exposed ones, even amongst the rocks where there is little or no soil, and where scarcely any other tree will grow. In low situations and deep soils the larch grows fast, but produced timber of little value, it being nearly all sap. On the mountains it grows more slowly, but it is nearly all heart, & is valuable timber. [. . .] On their accounts the Duke of Athol now plants all his high mountain grounds with larch, but plants none of these in the lower grounds where other trees will thrive. (1807)

Larches are somewhat hardy trees that prosper where the soil is poorer. Consequently, like the Duke of Athol, Marshall advocates the planting of this tree at higher altitudes. Whilst they might have been rather grudgingly accepted, such notions influenced Wordsworth, as is evidenced in a letter by Dorothy, wherein she writes to Jane Marshall that '[my brother] has made great use of Mr Marshall's observations on planting [. . .] He recommends to everybody to plant larches on their high rocky grounds – and oak, ash, etc. on their richer and low grounds' (1937, I, 147). Equally, in the *Guide*, there is a rather strained echo of this, as he entreats that 'native deciduous trees may be left in complete possession of the lower ground; and that plantations of larch, if introduced at all, may be confined to the highest and most barren tracts' ([1835] 1977, 88). For Wordsworth, as long as broadleaved trees retain custody of the lower ground, the larch can appear to hold an advantage at elevated sites. These observations also reveal that, for Wordsworth and his contemporaries, the higher and lower places on fells were viewed against different aesthetic standards and cultural associations.

In Wordsworth's *Guide*, the author suggests that the larch changes its visual character on higher ground: 'the winds would take hold of the trees, and imprint upon their shapes a wildness congenial to their situation' ([1835] 1977, 88). The location of the tree, whether planted or self-seeded, is integral to Wordsworth's

assessments: the 'wildness' of the climate at a high altitude would shape the larch into a more agreeable form. The tree becomes an aeolian product of this environment, and equally reinforces that non-human 'wildness' to the spectator. This reciprocal dynamic between tree and place is evoked by Jones and Cloke in their discussions of 'arbori-cultural' materiality:

> Because trees generally grow slowly (in relation to humans and other beings) and because of their size, nature and form, certain conditions of a place can become materially articulated in the form of the tree; thus, they represent places in other ways. The body of the tree both embodies and contains a cartographic record of certain aspects of a place, and represents these in a visible form which contributes to place milieu. (2020, 94)

Trees become an 'embodied reminder' of place and climate, and the corporeal form of the tree is at once part of and a visual record for the topography in which it is situated (2020, 94). Trees 'articulate' place, and equally, this position shapes the manifestation of their physical expression. In such circumstances, the larch is no longer a product of 'vegetable manufactory'; for Wordsworth, the higher limits of the fells subsume and form the larch into a 'cartographic record' of its upland environs. As the final section of this analysis will explore, it was not just the larch but a number of species that might become an expression of altitudinal materiality for Wordsworth.

'Tree Mountaineers' and expressions of altitudinal materiality

Trees gain a different character and set of associations on higher ground. In this situation, they become what John Muir refers to as a 'tree mountaineer', an individual of any species that, to the human eye, appears to strike out and upwards in its placement and growth at high altitudes. Muir's first use of the term appears in his *First Summer in the Sierra* (written in 1869), and here he describes a juniper tree in the following manner:

> A thickset, sturdy, picturesque highlander, seemingly content to live for more than a score of centuries on sunshine and snow; a truly wonderful fellow, dogged endurance expressed in every feature, lasting about as long as the granite he stands on. [. . .] Surely the most enduring of all tree mountaineers, it never seems to die a natural death, or even to fall after it has been killed. If protected from accidents, it would perhaps be immortal. I saw some that had withstood an avalanche from snowy Mount Hoffman cheerily putting out new branches, as if repeating [. . .] 'Never say die'. (2007, 119)

This natural phenomenon often takes the form of isolated individuals or small groups of trees that appear to thrive against the odds of the mountainous climate. Muir depicts the juniper as a 'picturesque highlander' that appears in its physical formation to be as enduring as the rock on which it grows. For Jones and Cloke, disentangling the non-human agency of trees from anthropocentric modes of viewing them is complicated by the human failure to see their 'own ecological time-scales', and the 'differing velocities and rhythms' within which they operate (2008, 82, 87). Though the juniper tree is undoubtedly anthropomorphised by Muir in its figuration as a 'mountaineer', the author's suggestions of the tree's physical existence occurring at a different (more long term) timescale than his own demonstrates an early sensitivity to a different kind of 'rhythm'. For Muir, the tree even appears to transcend geological scales, as it 'never seems to die

a natural death' this 'enduring' arboreal existence is likened to something beyond the human and the nonhuman, its exceptionality equated with immortality.

Whilst Muir and Wordsworth write within different timescales, geographies, and wilderness traditions, comparable arboreal occurrences occur in the *Guide*. Similarly to his descriptions of the wind-formed larch, Wordsworth writes that:

> From low and sheltered places, vegetation travels upwards 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 be thus produced is broken by rocks, or by glades or open places, where the browsing 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 the mountains. 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. (1977, 85)

A 'climber' in vegetal terms is a 'plant which climbs or creeps upwards by attaching itself to some support', and Wordsworth also refers to vegetation that 'travels upwards' and 'ascends' in this environment (*OED*, 2022). A place-bound association transforms the tree that can 'climb high up the mountains' into a mountaineering entity, as much as a botanical one. Whilst such trees are described as 'hardy' rather than immortal, they likewise gain a kind of exceptional ecological identity for the author. These bold specimens defy the odds of the climate and thrive on mountainsides and tops. A few pages later, Wordsworth also refers to 'trees climbing up to the horizon, and, in some places, ascending from its sharp edge, in which they are rooted, with the whole body of the tree appearing to stand in the clear sky' ([1835] 1977, 89). The physical framing of such trees is an attempt to understand their seemingly miraculous and precarious existences.

Ridge-grown trees also populate Lakeland places in Wordsworth's earlier poetry. Depictions of outlying specimens figure as anthropomorphic renderings and/or as imaginative landmarks for the speaker in question. Through these arboreal expressions, Wordsworth explores the articulation of elevated place in the Lake District. In 'The Oak and the Broom' for instance, the shepherd recalls 'a crag, a lofty stone' on Nab Scar, and '[out] of its head an Oak had grown,/A Broom out of its feet' (2011, ll. 11, 13–14). From there, the tree and the shrub share a vegetal exchange; the Oak tells the Broom that rocks have recently dislodged themselves from above and conjectures that 'Heaven knows how soon' the Broom will 'perish' in these circumstances (ll. 49, 50). Of course, the irony of the tale's conclusion is that after this dialogue, it is the Oak not the Broom, that is dislodged and 'whirled [. . .] far away' from the crag in a storm (l. 107). Through a somewhat straightforward, and therefore rare, instance of arboreal anthropomorphism for Wordsworth, the shepherd's story functions as a parable of prideful behaviour for the children at his knee. Nevertheless, in content, it is an early example that highlights Wordsworth's meditations on the harsh climes of the fells.

In 'The Haunted Tree', Wordsworth refers to a 'time-dismantled' oak tree on a ridge at the top of Rydal Park (1952, l. 7). This tree is not given a voice but makes a 'creaking sound' in the wind, which has been identified by locals to be a 'Hamadryad, pent within' or a 'troubled ghost' which '[haunts] the old trunk' (ll. 26, 28, 29). However, the speaker states

that 'no wind/Sweeps now along this elevated ridge' and so the tree is 'mute; and, in his silence, would look down' to 'his coevals in the sheltered vale' below (ll. 30–31, 33, 36). The oak's contemporaries do not look up, but instead 'view/Their own far-stretching arms and leafy heads/Vividly pictured in some glassy pool' (ll. 37–39). In response to this opposing dynamic, Tim Fulford suggests that:

> the privileged picture that these waterside trees together gain of themselves is potentially narcissistic [. . .] Solitary self-observation is here firmly relegated below the more bracing relationship possible if one risks the more exposed spot on the ridge, where the tree may be assaulted by violence both natural (wind) and human (desire). (2019, 190)

'The Oak and the Broom' does not privilege the physical elevation of the Oak over the Broom in moral terms (in fact, it is quite the opposite), but in 'The Haunted Tree' the stance and placement of the lowland trees enables their vanity, whilst the ridge-grown existence of the windswept oak offers a more positive example of arboreal existence.

The most revealing example of an elevated tree in Wordsworth's poetic output exists in Book XI of *The Prelude* (1805 ed.). Wordsworth remembers being a young boy waiting to be picked up for the Christmas holidays and repairing '[u]p to the highest summit' on the 'crag' where he awaited the coach that was to take him home (2011, ll. 350, 355). The poet recalls that:

> I sate, half-sheltered by a naked wall;
>
> Upon my right hand was a single sheep,
>
> A whistling hawthorn on my left, and there,
>
> With those companions at my side, I watched [the valley below] (ll. 358–61

The wall, sheep, and tree become associated 'companions' for the young Wordsworth in this moment. Like 'The Haunted Tree', the hawthorn is an exposed specimen characterised by the fact that it 'whistl[es]' in the wind. However, this is not an example of arboreal anthropomorphism; instead, in this moment, the tree is formed into a psychogeographical entity within the poet's imagination. Wordsworth continues to recollect that after his father's death in the holidays, it was this particular place and time, these 'spectacles and sounds to which/I often would repair' (ll. 383–84). In his mind, Wordsworth returns to this scene in which a version of his past self can be recovered. Julia S. Carlson makes cartographic connections between the lines in the landscape and lines in Wordsworth's poetry, and notes that it is in this moment on the crossroads wherein Wordsworth 'illuminat[es] his mind's formation in the landscape' (2016, 99). Whilst Wordsworth's famous 'Yew-Trees' are markers of a distant Lakeland past, in actuality and in his imagination, the elevated hawthorn in *The Prelude* is a landmark that is connected to and indicative of Wordsworth's own self and intimate experiences.

These climbing trees in the *Guide* and the poetry help to shape the wildness of their situation for the spectator, but the characterisation of them as relatable and alien entities is also a way of forging and expressing a kind of human and non-human kinship with that same place. Through such chameleonic expressions it is fair to say that at a higher elevation, trees transcend the same cultural associations and socio-political limitations

that trees (and tree-places) further down into the valley are subject to. The conceptualisation of the 'tree mountaineer', or climber, becomes a unique way of comprehending that specific terrain, and cultural perceptions of trees more widely. In turn, this forces in to question whether there is a defined altitudinal boundary at which trees become 'tree mountaineer(s)'. They are certainly at, beyond, and representative of Poetzch and Falke's 'boundary of where the wild begins'; but as these authors suggest, this borderline can happen within a lowland garden or upon a mountain slope. This 'boundary' is not reliant on an elevated space then. However, in the writings of Wordsworth and Martineau, trees that are existing at a high altitude offer and engender a different conception of 'wildness' than their peers in the valley.

Martineau captures this conceptual space in the *Complete Guide*, as she imagines an individual climbing up through 'straggling woodland' and how 'the stranger [then] arrives at a clump on the ridge, – the last clump, and thenceforth feels himself wholly free' ([1855] 1858, 62–63). For Martineau, trees are an indication of how far the mountaineer has climbed, and when the last specimens are reached, that 'stranger' then feels 'wholly free'. Trees that strike out from a defined boundary are part of a wilderness that outlies the impact of man's influence, and in moving to and beyond that space, for Martineau at least, that wildness becomes synonymous with a kind of freedom. To quote Kerri Andrews, it is important to note that in the nineteenth century, 'few guidebooks paid much attention to the higher ground in the Lake District, unless it could be readily accessed by car, coach or donkey' (2021, 104). At this point then, Martineau's and Wordsworth's attention to the upper regions of the Lake District and their emphasis on the 'freedom' to be found there, suggests that it was a largely unfamiliar terrain to the majority of tourists at the time. The elevated spaces at which the 'tree mountaineer' appears are beyond 'car, coach or donkey'. In botanical terms, certain tree species will thrive better than others at specific altitudes, and so there are individualised boundaries at which different species might appear. Broadly speaking then, if altitude is a central component to the identification of a 'tree mountaineer', inevitably, this does mean that certain kinds of trees must be excluded from the parameters of this phenomenon.

Later than Wordsworth and Martineau, in *A Flora of the English Lake District* (1885), John Gilbert Baker defines four altitudinal zones across the Lakeland fells at which vegetation – including trees – changes. The framework offers an insight into the altitude(s), and therefore the kinds of trees, that might encapsulate and embody the 'tree mountaineer'. For Baker, Zone 1, the Mid-agrarian zone, is anything from sea level to 900 feet; within which Baker refers to the woods around Windermere, Derwentwater, Ullswater, and Bassenthwaite, as examples. Zone 2 is the Super-agrarian zone (900–1800 feet), above which 'there are no trees, either wild or planted, except for a few isolated rowans and junipers on the high crags' (1885, 5). In Zone 3, the Infer-arctic zone (1800–2700 feet) and at the limits of Zone 4, referred to as the Mid-arctic zone (over 2700 ft), there is much less vegetation. On the summits of the highest fells, as Baker suggests, there is often 'nothing but bare rocky hill-top, with a very scanty vegetation of any kind' (1885, 6). Most trees grow between Zones 1 and 2 (up to 1800 feet) in the Lakes, but there are individuals of particular species that transcend this limit too. As Baker notes, the rowan (or mountain ash) is found 'amongst the slate and limestone hills' of the region, and the author has even seen the tree 'at 900 yards on the Striding-edge Crag' of Helvellyn (1885, 92). The rowan

can be found 'ascending higher than any other tree except the juniper', which has been seen on 'Helvellyn, Grisedale Pike, and Scawfell Pike' (1885, 92, 192). Baker does not refer to these botanical exceptions with the same reverence that Muir does, but there is still a sense that the trees beyond and at the upper limit of Zone 2 are noteworthy natural phenomena that defy the limitations of any human classification.

Baker affirms that due to their capacity to self-seed in shallow soil and small crevices, the rowan is a notable species and expression of altitudinal materiality in the Lake District. In Martineau's *Complete Guide*, the species forms a kind of way-marker for the touring hiker; in describing her route up Great Gable for instance, the author states that there 'is a mountain ash on the way at some height above, which must be reached. It is here that care is required as regards the path' ([1855] 1858, 305). The mountain ash is a point at which the mountaineer orients themselves in the landscape, a site to be reached in order to climb the fell safely. Equally, as Martineau records how to descend via Styhead Tarn and Skew Gill, she notes that 'a small mountain-ash comes in sight a few yards below, and a pile of stones erected in sport by some dalesman [. . .] is in front' ([1855] 1858, 313). Alongside a cairn the tree is once again a kind of natural signpost, directing Martineau and her reader in navigating the openness of the fells. At valley level trees are commonplace, but at a Lakeland elevation they are remarkable entities in their hardiness and sporadic existence. Similarly to Wordsworth's 'whistling hawthorn', their placement within that landscape becomes a navigational tool that allows the individual climbing to both comprehend and connect with these environs.

For Martineau, the situation of the mountain ash as 'tree mountaineer' is notable because it occurs outside of human endeavour and interference:

> [Nature] sows her seeds in crevices, or on little projections, so that the bare face of the precipice becomes feathered with the rowan and the birch: and thus, ere long, motion is produced by the passing winds, in a scene where all once appeared rigid as a mine. (1858, 138)

It is 'Nature', as a personified deity nonetheless, that 'sows' these trees at such precipitous points. Comparably to Wordsworth's conceptions of climbing trees, the interplay between 'passing winds' and precariously situated trees transforms the elevated 'scene'. Once again, the value attached to these specimens is bound up with the visual quality that they provide within a geological environment. Furthermore, what is notable in Martineau's depiction, is that the trees transform and provide dynamism within an environment that appears as 'rigid as a mine'. The nonhuman agency of these individuals makes an environment – that looks as if it has been shaped by a human hand – appear more 'natural' to the observer. Of course, this is not to say that all trees in the lowlands are merely a product of cultivation, or that their materiality cannot be indicative of wildness too. However, by the very nature of their altitudinal situation, the 'tree mountaineer' gains a kind of agency that eludes the roles that humans attribute to them at lower levels (for aesthetic purposes or for timber, for example). They are not simply 'the boundary at where the wild begins', they are a responsive and visual manifestation of wildness itself.

Whilst the 'wild' is also an anthropocentric mode of conceiving the natural world, the 'tree mountaineer' is a site at which the perceived elemental freedom of nature intersects with the cultural associations around trees. Wordsworth offers material expressions of climbing specimens that mostly evade anthropomorphism in their self-seeded state, and

in doing so, such representation leaves room for something else, something other than the human. For Martineau, they become a product of a kind of freedom on the fells that is outside of man's control. In both cases, these arboreal forms are unfamiliar and offer connections with the environment at once, and also appear to have more non-human agency in their material form, ecological scale, and physical placement.

Conclusion

The lack of tree cover up to mountain tops in the Lake District is a result of human and natural forces, agricultural shifts and altitudinal ordinances. The writings of Wordsworth and Martineau record how the uplands have a complex network of planted and self-seeded trees in close proximity, but the higher one goes, the more 'scattered' arboreal presence becomes. Fells were planted in accordance with social, political, and aesthetic preferences, by the likes of John Marshall, and in moving upwards beyond the tree line, and in to the wild and 'barren tracts' nearer the summits, trees are further removed from the physical and associational limits of human cultivation. Respectively, the lack of trees in these upper regions of the Lake District is the very reason why they gain an exceptional identity in appearance and association. These trees are perceived as outside of the concerns of agriculture, the aesthetic principles of planting, and often in defiance of any botanical rules too. This means that the spectator, and in this case Wordsworth, Martineau, and their readers, must view such specimens in a different light. In this reframing, these trees become something else altogether, both alien and kin, simultaneously. Through this, the concept of the 'tree mountaineer', might allow us, to paraphrase Val Plumwood, to 're-imagine' trees in 'richer terms' (Plumwood 1997, 127), and reorient our human responses to and relationships with these nonhuman neighbours, and their environments more broadly.

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Notes on contributor

Anna Burton is a Lecturer in English Literature at the University of Derby and a specialist in long nineteenth-century nature writing and environmental literature. Anna's recent monograph, Trees in Nineteenth-Century English Fiction: The Silvicultural Novel, was published with Routledge in 2021. Her current research explores the cultural and literary history of tree planting in the English Lake District.

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