Authorial Effects at Work in the English Lakes: The Curious Case of Tarn Hows

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Abstract: This article examines one of the more curious beauty spots on the literary tourist's map of the English Lake District: Tarn Hows, near Coniston. This artificial lake, with its islands and ornamental groves, is one of the most iconic properties in the Lake District, and tracing its development as a visitor attraction reveals how particular writers have influenced the management of the region's landscapes. The history of Tarn Hows affirms the effects that some of the Lake District's most notable literary figures, including both the Wordsworths and Beatrix Potter, had on the property's design and preservation. Taking note of these effects is interesting for the insights they afford into the construction of the Lake District's cultural status. But noting the effects the Wordsworths and Potter had on Tarn Hows is also valuable because it helps us conceive of the idea of 'the author effect' in a different way. Building on Nicola Watson's recent consideration of the influence of 'authors' effects' on the interpretation of certain writers, I propose an alternative way of understanding how the actions of particular authors have affected the histories of specific places. Such an understanding, I contend, enables us to appreciate how seemingly non-literary locations, like Tarn Hows, can become sites of interest for literary tourists.

Keywords: Lake District; Tarn Hows; Wordsworth; Beatrix Potter; literary tourism; literary geography

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I.

'Poetry makes nothing happen', or so the saying goes (Auden 1940, 108). A work's aesthetic autonomy is one thing. The responses it elicits are quite another. Such distinctions seem sound enough in the abstract. In practice, they are harder to maintain. Terentianus was right when he claimed that books have their own fates, but he was shrewd enough to add that their destinies depended on their readers. A book's meaning changes when it becomes part of our lived experience. Equally though, books change our experience of the world.

So it is with literary tourism. Few activities so clearly demonstrate how literature lives with us and how it can shape and colour our perceptions. In some cases, a compelling story can quicken our impression of a given place. Niels Bohr's contemplation of Kronborg Castle comes to mind. 'Isn't it strange', he is said to have remarked, 'how the castle changes as soon as one imagines that Hamlet lived here?' (Heisenberg 1977, 51). In other cases, this sort of imagining can have more lasting, physical effects. The locations considered by the contributors to this special issue are each a case in point.

But few places have been as affected by literary tourism as the English Lake District. The region is unusually rich in literary associations, both biographical and narratival (see Lindop 2005). These associations, as John Urry once observed, are integral to the 'place myth' that has come to constitute the region's cultural identity (1995, 194). For centuries, they have conditioned the way the Lake District has been viewed, and they have helped consolidate its reputation as, in Keith Hanley's words, 'an imaginatively privileged area' (2013, 125). What really sets the Lake District apart, however, is the degree to which these literary associations have influenced the management of the region.

Several studies have documented this phenomenon (see, indicatively, Walton 2013 and Yoshikawa 2014). Collectively, they verify how certain writers and literary works have shaped

both the cultural status of the Lake District and the priorities of the organisations that have overseen the region's development. In my own work, I have explained how the literary history of the Lakes informed the region's designation as a National Park in 1951 and a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2017 (Donaldson 2019). Here, I want to take a different tack. Instead of surveying the Lake District as a whole, I want to focus on how its literary culture has affected the fortunes of one of its most iconic properties: Tarn Hows, near Coniston.

This artificial pond, with its small islands and ornamental groves, is an especially popular visitor attraction. But I have not decided to focus on Tarn Hows just because of its popularity. Rather, I have chosen to examine the site because tracing its history reveals the curious ways authors and their works have helped shape the region's landscapes.

The history of Tarn Hows affirms the effects that some of the Lake District's most notable literary figures, including both Dorothy and William Wordsworth and Beatrix Potter, had on the property's design and preservation. Taking note of these effects is interesting for the insight it affords into the construction of the Lake District's 'place myth'. This myth is, after all, largely a consequence of the desire to see ideals sourced from art and literature manifested in the region's physical environment. But noting the effects the Wordsworths and Potter had on Tarn Hows is also valuable because it helps us conceive of the idea of 'the author effect' in a different way. Specifically, it moves us beyond the conception of the author as a kind of classificatory function (à la Barthes and Foucault) and towards an appreciation of the ways writers have affected the histories of specific locations.

Such an appreciation of authorial effects builds on the one Nicola Watson has recently proposed in *The Author's Effects*. But whereas Watson's study elucidates how 'writer's house museums' effect particular interpretations of authors through the assemblage and display of those authors' 'belongings, or "effects"' (Watson 2020, 4), here, I want us to think less in terms of things than of places, and I want to emphasise the at times idiosyncratic ways that the 'local' influence of literary figures is mediated by time and circumstance.

Taking these dynamics into account, I contend, helps us understand how seemingly non-literary places, like Tarn Hows, can become sites of interest for literary tourists. Tarn Hows, as we shall see, is not an ordinary literary destination. It is not the Wordsworths' Grasmere, nor is it Potter's Hill Top Farm. But thanks to the influence these writers exerted on it, Tarn Hows fulfils the very view of the Lake District that tourists steeped in the literature of the region expect to see.

[Insert Figure 1.]

Figure 1. Tarn Hows, near Coniston. Author's photograph.

II.

Few spots in the Lake District are better known than Tarn Hows. The little wooded lakelet is undoubtedly one of the most beloved beauty spots in the region. It is certainly one of the most frequently photographed. Although it is tucked away in the fells to the north of Coniston Water, the property, with its meandering shoreline and rocky, heather-tufted knolls, has appeared on countless chocolate boxes and biscuit tins. Grevel Lindop reckons it has also turned up on more calendars than Marilyn Monroe (2005, 316). Yet despite the celebrity status Tarn Hows now enjoys, it is not a place mentioned in most early guides to the Lakes. Even when it does show up, it is described in ways that might surprise us.

In the past, the name Tarn Hows did not mean the little tree-lined tarn adored by visitors today. Instead, it referred to a nearby hill and farmhouse, both of which provided scenic viewpoints on the way from Coniston to Ambleside. The 1835 edition of Wordsworth's *Guide*, for instance, advised that the 'mountain track which has the farm of Tarn Hows a little on the right' afforded 'the best view' of Coniston Water (1835, ix–x). Five years later, Thomas De Quincey referred to Tarn Hows as a 'steep hill' from which 'the whole lake', with its 'beautiful foregrounds, all rush upon the eye with the effect of a pantomimic surprise' (1840, 346). This

description does call to mind the hide-and-seek-like quality of the scenery for which Tarn Hows is famous. For all that though, the spots Wordsworth and De Quincey had in mind are clearly not quite the place we know as Tarn Hows now.

Technically, Wordsworth and De Quincey are in the right. The name Tarn Hows comes from the Old Norse words tjørn ('mountain pool') and haugr ('free-standing hill'). Taken literally, it means 'the hills by the pool' (Whaley 2006, 336). Here, toponymy provides an index for examining a historical shift in perception. It proves that Tarn Hows once referred not to a little wood-fringed pond among the hills, but to the hills themselves and, by extension, to a farmhouse nestled among them. Today we think differently, of course. Consider, to pick a more recent book at random, the account of the spot in Jules Brown's *Rough Guide to the Lake District*. He calls Tarn Hows 'a beautiful body of water surrounded by spruce and pine' (2013, 127), which is precisely how most people would describe the property these days. But how did this change of perception come about? Who was it that put the tarn in Tarn Hows?

III.

Explanations that attribute historic changes to single individuals are almost always too simplistic. But in the case of Tarn Hows, the modern character of the property really does owe a good deal to the vision of one man: James Garth Marshall (1802–1873). The son of a wealthy family of flax manufacturers from Leeds, Marshall began purchasing properties in the Lake District during the 1830s, and the landscaping projects he eventually undertook left a lasting imprint on Tarn Hows.

A member of the Liberal Party, and an MP for Leeds, Marshall was a progressive but staunchly utilitarian thinker. His interest in the scenic beauty of the Lake District was combined with a practical-minded commitment to social, industrial, and agricultural improvement. In this respect, he followed his father John Marshall (1765–1845), who had begun investing a portion of the family's wealth in buying estates in the Lake District in the 1810s. Like his father, moreover,

James's interest in the properties he purchased and developed was strongly influenced by the Wordsworths.

The Marshalls and Wordsworths were family friends. James's mother, Jane (née Pollard) (1770–1847) and Dorothy Wordsworth had known each other as children, and they remained on close terms throughout their lives. Their affection for one another was strong enough to bridge the political divisions that would have otherwise set their families apart. Dorothy's brother William was fiercely opposed to manufacturing and social reform, whereas John Marshall championed both. As Derek Denman has noted in his study of the two families, William and John were both headstrong men who 'inhabited separate cultural domains' (2011, 214). Their 'scope for agreement' on several issues 'was limited' (2011, 20).

Dorothy and Jane's friendship helped smooth over these differences, and it enabled William and John to find a common ground. Though their first meeting in 1800 had been frosty, by 1807 they had developed a mutual passion for landscape management. Both men held similar views on this subject. Both were adamant about the importance of naturalistic landscape design and about the cultivation of native species, including hardwood trees. Both, moreover, militated against what Marshall called the 'villainous' practice of planting foreign conifers, such as spruces and larches, in 'square patches' and 'straight lines' (Denman 2011, 228).

William evidently respected John's views, and he helped to reinforce them. He even incorporated some of John's ideas about conifer plantations in his *Guide through the District of the Lakes* (see Denman 2011, pp. 224–29). Such statements chimed with William's own convictions about the way the scenery of the Lakes had 'suffered' from the indiscriminate planting of larch and spruce trees (Wordsworth 1810, 55). As Dorothy wrote to Jane in the autumn of 1807, 'My Brother has made great use of Mr Marshall's observations on planting, with which he has been greatly pleased, as they coincide with his own previous ideas of what should be' (Wordsworth and Wordsworth 1969, 169).

John, for his part, came to rely on William and Dorothy in matters of real estate

acquisition and landscape management. He took their advice when buying his first property in the region in 1811, and he and his family continued to seek their counsel over the following decades. It was the Wordsworths who helped convince the Marshalls that their Lake District estates should be managed in a way that complemented the region's native character. It was the Wordsworths, moreover, who encouraged the Marshalls 'to plant and protect woodland' areas on their lands (Denman 2011, 271).

In this way, the eco-aesthetic ideals that the Wordsworths espoused in their writings, and which were later to draw visitors to the Lake District, found a physical manifestation through the work of a family who became one of the principal landholders in the region. The Marshalls owned more than 6,000 acres in the Lakes by the mid-1840s, and, as Denman has observed, their wealth enabled them to carry out landscaping projects that the Wordsworths 'wished to see but had neither the means nor influence to achieve' (2011, 236, 289). Such developments exemplify the sort of tangible effects that writers and their ideas can bring about. A poet's words alone may make 'nothing happen', but they can inspire people with sufficient power to shape the world.

[Insert Figure 2.]

Figure 2. Edward Stanford's map of Coniston (1872); inset map added.[1] Author's collection.

One of the Marshall family's later purchases was the Monk Coniston estate at the north end of Coniston Water. John assisted his son James Garth in acquiring this property in

[1] In spite of its date of publication, Stanford's map was evidently based on a survey completed before Marshall began developing the landscape around Tarn Hows in the mid-1860s. Notice that the tarn present at the site today does not appear here.

September 1835, and he had the Wordsworths' help in doing so. The previous December, William's wife Mary (née Hutchinson) had written to the Marshalls to let them know that the estate would soon be on the market. William, she explained, 'begs his kind regards to Mr. M. and bids me tell him, that the beautiful property of the late Mr. Knott of Coniston Water-head will be offered for Sale by Advertisement early next month' (1958, 136).

This 'Mr. Knott' was Michael Knott (1774–1834), whose family had owned the property since 1769. Michael completed a series of improvements around the estate after taking possession of it in 1806. He established new parklands and woodlands, and he renovated the estate's mansion, which he dubbed Waterhead House (Chris Burnett Associates 2002, 2.6–2.16; Menuge 2013, 147–49). Some of the fruits of these labours are displayed on Edward Stanford's map of Coniston (Figure 2), and they were praised in the tourist literature of the day. The eleventh edition of Thomas West's *Guide to the Lakes*, for one, noted how Knott's 'handsome improvements [. . .] contrasted with the native rudeness of the surrounding hills' (West 1821, 54).

When James Garth Marshall purchased the property in 1835, he continued this programme of improvement. But his ambitions and designs were of a decidedly different scale. Over the next decade, he augmented his estate by buying neighbouring parcels of land. These acquisitions included Tarn Hows, which Marshall purchased in 1839 along with the nearby estates of Yewdale, Tent Lodge, and Tilberthwaite. Having thus increased his holdings, he planned and carried out a programme of landscape development.

Over the next 30 years, Marshall made a number of noteworthy changes. Some of these related to private commercial interests. For instance, he invested in developing the slate quarries in Tilberthwaite and the sawmill at Far End, near Coniston (Chris Burnett Associates 2002, 2.25; Gibson 1849, 126). But many of the other changes Marshall made were for public benefit. He funded the installation of bridges, footpaths, and pony drives, as well as the construction of the Waterhead Hotel.

These changes displeased some people. John Ruskin for one scoffed that the 'vast hotel'

was 'built in the railroad station style' (Ruskin 1905, xxxiii). But these projects reflected Marshall's personal philosophy. Like his father before him, he believed in the value of time spent amidst rural scenery and in the principle of providing for the happiness of the greatest number. He wanted visitors to enjoy his Lake District properties, and he also wanted to provide for the comfort and recreation of his guests, some of whom, like Alfred Tennyson and Thomas Carlyle, ranked among the more eminent writers of the age.[2]

[Insert Figure 3.]

Figure 3. Sidney Richard Percy, *Low Tarn, near Coniston* (c. 1850). Author's collection.

But of all the changes Marshall made to his estates, none reflects his ideals and aspirations quite like his transformation of Tarn Hows. When Marshall purchased the property in 1839 it did not look like it does today. For starters, it contained not one tarn but three. (The southernmost of these pools is labelled 'Low Tarn' on Stanford's map.) What is more, those tarns were not surrounded with conifers and hardwood groves, but with moorland scrub and peat moss. Sidney Richard Percy's *Low Tarn, near Coniston* (Figure 3) gives a sense of how the scene would have looked.

During the 1860s, Marshall decided to dam these three small tarns in order to regulate the flow of water to his sawmill at Far End. The precise date of the damming is not clear, but notes

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[2] Marshall's wife, Mary Alicia (née Spring Rice) (c.1815–1875), was the sister of Tennyson's college friend Stephen Spring Rice (1814–1865). It was on account of this connection that Tennyson and his wife, Emily (née Sellwood), honeymooned at Tent Lodge in 1850. The couple later paid a visit to Monk Coniston in 1857. On that occasion, Tennyson and his son Hallam were photographed, along with James, Mary Alica, and their daughter, Julia, by Lewis Carroll (see Menuge 2013, 149–50).

Marshall made in 1866 suggests the works were completed about then (Chris Burnett Associates 2001, 3.3.12). What is certain though is that Marshall's landscaping at Tarn Hows was not merely practical. It was also ornamental. It enabled him to form the picturesquely contoured pond we now know as Tarn Hows.

That Tarn Hows should have been created through such a programme of improvement distinguishes the property as a unique legacy of the Lake District's Victorian past. A pleasure garden on a grand scale, it reflects the imaginative view of the region that the art and literature of the era had made fashionable. Crucially though, for Marshall, this garden was also an industrialist's arcadia: a place as beautiful as it was functional. But this is not all: for in addition to flooding the three tarns to fuel his sawmill, Marshall also oversaw a programme of decorative planting. The crowning jewels of this programme were the groves of broadleaved trees (including alders, beeches, and cherries, as well as sycamores and willows), which Marshall had placed around the estate to accent its rocky ground.

Marshall's plans for these plantations reflect principles his father shared in common with the Wordsworths, including a preference for native hardwood trees. As the notes he prepared in 1866 make plain, Marshall's broadleaved groves were to consist of scattered 'groups' interspersed with 'un-planted' areas that left 'considerable spaces' for 'heather to grow' (Chris Burnett Associates 2001, Appendix 4). The design was in equal measures naturalistic and picturesque. It is true that Marshall chose to surround these 'groups' with cordons of faster-growing conifers, such as spruces and larches. But his notes clarify that these foreign trees were intended to serve as 'nurses'. They were planted in order to provide a temporary shelter for his broadleaved saplings. Once those saplings had matured, the conifers around the lower-lying parts of the property were to be removed.

This strategy mirrored aspects of the plantations Marshall's father had established, with the Wordsworths' input, around Loweswater fifty years earlier (Denman 2001, 272–74). But even more so than his father's woodlands, Marshall's designs at Tarn Hows fulfilled the Wordsworths'

ideal of prioritising beauty and simplicity over profitability. William, for one, had written passionately about this principle in 1810, when he first developed the position that the Lakes constituted a kind of commons for the aesthetically enlightened. The region was, as he wrote, 'a sort of national property, in which every man' with 'an eye to perceive and a heart to enjoy' had 'a right and interest' (1810, 62). It was therefore a place that should be spared from the potentially deleterious effects of short-term, profit-driven planting.

True to these ideals, the groves at Tarn Hows were not a commercial undertaking. They were part of an ornamental landscape that was intended not just for present delight but also for future generations. Marshall's decision to plant slow-growing hardwood trees in decorative groups suggests as much. Some of those trees would take years to reach maturity. Marshall, who was in his sixties when the planting started, must have known that he was unlikely to live long enough to see his vision wholly fulfilled.

This aspect of Marshall's design affirms the long-term effect of the Wordsworths' vision of the region. But it also sets Tarn Hows at variance with some of the more famous engineering projects undertaken in the Lake District during the Victorian era. One thinks especially of the construction of the Thirlmere reservoir and of the dense plantations of conifers that were eventually placed around it.

The history of Thirlmere is too well known to require extended discussion here.[3] But it is worth recalling that the creation of this reservoir was the most widely debated of the water abstraction schemes carried out in the Lakes during the nineteenth century. The lake of Thirlmere once comprised two small bodies of water, Leathes Water and Wythburn Water. The valley surrounding these two pools was relandscaped and flooded during the 1880s and '90s to provide a new water supply for the city of Manchester, nearly 100 miles to the south.

[3] Readers interested to know more about the history of Thirlmere should turn to Harriet Ritvo's *The Dawn of Green* (2009).

The engineers who oversaw the works at Thirlmere added decorative features and amenities to the site, including ornamental islands and a ring road. But those engineers also thinned and cleared many of the deciduous trees around the lake and replaced them with stands of larches, spruces, pines, and firs. This latter change was largely practical. Concerns were expressed both about the 'impurities' introduced to the water by 'dead leaves' and about 'the cost and trouble' of clearing such debris from the reservoir each autumn (Hinchliffe 1924, 16). But the introduction of these new coniferous woodlands dramatically transformed the local landscape.

It is instructive to consider the creation of Thirlmere and the damming of Tarn Hows in tandem, the one illuminating the other. One was the act of a progressively minded local landholder, who designed an ornamental tarn to power a sawmill. The other was a major civil engineering project carried out to provide an expanding urban and industrial centre with water. Both adapted the environment of the Lake District in order to utilise its resources. But whereas the groves Marshall arranged around his new tarn were intended as a decorative accompaniment to the countryside, the plantations at Thirlmere were a cost-cutting measure that fundamentally changed the character of the locality.

As Harriet Ritvo has noted, these plantations were part of the 'first large-scale afforestation project' in the region's history, and the decision to plant stands 'of pine, spruce, larch, and fir' trees 'in regimented blocks' resulted in 'dark geometrical masses' that many people considered destructive and defacing (Ritvo 2009, 128). This was precisely the sort of 'villainous' planting that the Marshalls and Wordsworths reviled, and it had the effect of estranging Thirlmere from the rest of the region. One of the sources Ritvo quotes sums up this impression by proposing that these plantations seemed rather more in keeping with the scenery of the Black Forest, and consequently made 'one feel' that, although Thirlmere was undeniably '*in*' the Lakes,

it was 'no longer *of* the Lake Country' (Ritvo 2009, 128).[4]

Such statements did not sweep all before them. By the mid-1940s, even a National Trust spokesman felt sufficiently emboldened to suggest that the Thirlmere 'plantations [we]re probably the best in the Lake District,' and that the issue was really 'a question of opinion' (Thompson 1946, 16). In other corners, however, the resentment caused by those conifers helped to motivate resistance to further plantations of larch and spruce trees in the region. Indicatively, during the Friends of the Lake District's battle with the Forestry Commission in the 1930s, Kenneth Spence pointed to Thirlmere as an example of the sort of landscaping that should be avoided. The conifers planted around the reservoir, he concluded, had 'made the vale of Thirlmere' a 'hard and un-Lakes-like valley' (1937, 246).

What is curious though is that Spence did not choose to tar Tarn Hows with the same brush. By the late '30s it too had begun to look like a rather un-Lakes-like place. But to appreciate this point, we need to consider the later history of the site.

IV.

Marshall did not live to see the full realisation of his vision for Tarn Hows. He died in 1873, and the property passed to his wife, Mary Alicia, and then to their son Victor (1841–1928). By 1886, however, the flax manufacturing firm that had made the Marshall family's name collapsed. Tarn Hows remained in their possession, but the planned clearance of the 'nurse' trees around the broadleaved groves was never carried out.

By this time, however, Marshall's designed landscape had begun to attract the attention of an increasing number of holidaymakers. As early as 1872, Henry Jenkinson's *Practical Guide to the English Lake District* had recommended this 'pretty tarn' as an ideal spot for a gentle stroll. 'The tourist who has leisure', Jenkinson advises, 'will enjoy wandering here for hours, and at every

[4] Ritvo is quoting Arnold (1924); emphasis in the original.

step [. . .] will have pleasing and ever-varying prospects' (1872, 110). During the following decade, moreover, accounts of Marshall's Tarn Hows estate circulated widely in works ranging from M.J.B. Baddeley's *Thorough Guide to the English Lake District* (1880) to Baedeker's *Great Britain* (1887). These were among the most influential and widely read guidebooks of the era, and their descriptions of Tarn Hows helped to put the property on the map.

The date of Baddeley's and Baedeker's books is significant. This was the early heyday of the day-tripper and the charabanc excursion, and the accessibility of Tarn Hows by carriage and cart from the resorts around Windermere added to its fame. By the end of the nineteenth century, one finds local worthies, such as the author and antiquary Henry Swainson Cowper (1865–1941), boasting of the property's beauty. 'Though we have travelled somewhat widely in Europe, Asia, and Africa,' Cowper writes, 'we can recall no place with so many varied beauties of colour and contour as this delightful spot' (1899, 16).

This is hyperbole, of course. But it is hyperbole that reveals a good deal about the values of its age. It marks Tarn Hows as a place of importance within the Empire, and it suggests how Marshall's designed landscape had become part of the imperialist's conception of the comforting scenery of the home country. In this way Cowper's statements help us see how Tarn Hows fulfilled the role that certain culturally enriched locations had come to play by the fin de siècle. This was, as Alison Booth reminds us, a period when 'aestheticized' and 'history-saturated' stretches of the English countryside were increasingly promoted as emblematic of the nation's character (Booth 2016, 50–51). But Cowper's descriptions of the 'varied beauties' of Tarn Hows soon give way to an acknowledgement of the bustling character of the property during the summer season. 'Here comes each day', adds Cowper, 'at least one char-a-banc load of sightseers from Ambleside or Windermere' (1899, 16).

[Insert Figure 4.]

Figure 4. A. Pettitt, 'Hawkshead Scenery: Tarn Hows'. Frontispiece to H.S. Cowper's

Hawkshead (1899). Courtesy of Lancaster University Library, Special Collections.

Cowper's book, which was published in 1899, includes a photograph of Tarn Hows as its frontispiece (Figure 4), and his comments work in tandem with this picture to give a glimpse of the property as it appeared to tourists in the final years of the Victorian era. The images Cowper conjures up are not entirely out of place in the present. Here, one finds Tarn Hows described as a place 'beloved, and rightly so, by skaters in winter and picnic parties in summer,' and enjoyed by visitors the whole year round for its 'marvellous variety' and its 'seeming distance from civilization' (1899, 16–17). Tarn Hows, the beauty spot we know today, had come into being.

But what is really intriguing about Cowper's account is that, for all his claims about the tarn's 'distance from civilization', he never loses sight of the fact that the pleasure-ground he's describing is a place created as much by man as by nature. He even goes so far as to acknowledge the work of the late 'proprietor, Mr Marshall', whom Cowper credits with having added 'to the great charms with which nature had lavishly endowed the place' (1899, 16).

Surveying the property from the south, he writes:

> There is a winding sheet of water of no great length, whose shore line is marked with tiny promontories and bays. On each side the shores rise fairly steeply, here covered with autumn heather and golden bracken, there hidden in dark plantations of spruce and larch. [. . .] The lake is blue, the banks brown, red, and black, the bracken gold. (1899, 16–17)

This sort of picturesque description suits the sensibilities of the period. But it also highlights Cowper's alertness to the artificiality of the scene he is admiring. He may not have known that those 'dark plantations' had survived longer than Marshall had intended, but Cowper's remarks affirm that he knew they were a foreign presence in the landscape. Rather than decrying them, however, he acknowledges them as a part of the tasteful composition of the scene.

Cowper was not alone in appreciating the human industry that had shaped Tarn Hows. Ward, Lock & Co's *Pictorial and Descriptive Guide* (a book carried by countless travellers a century ago) singled out Tarn Hows as 'a remarkable instance of what may be called "lake-gardening", for it was not a very attractive medley of small pools till the artistic enterprise of the owner converted them into their present form' (1916, 90). The effect of this 'enterprise', the *Guide* concludes, was to render the spot 'as pretty a picture as ever delighted the eye' (1916, 90).

Not everyone was so taken with the effects of Marshall's 'artistic enterprise', however. By the turn of the twentieth century, several writers had commented on the oddness of the conifers that were scattered around the property. These trees, which had not been cleared in accordance with Marshall's plans, had begun to seem a little out of place. As early as 1880, Baddeley had observed that the 'belt of fir' surrounding the 'graceful lakelet' made the scene look more Scottish than English (1880, 80). George Abraham echoed these observations in 1913. He noted that the property's 'larches and heather slopes' made it appear 'more like a Highland loch than any other water in Lakeland' (1913, 92).

These remarks remind one of the concerns Kenneth Spence expressed about the effect of the conifers at Thirlmere. Yet, it is clear that Baddeley and Abraham did not regard Tarn Hows as a 'hard and un-Lakes-like' place. They found it to be incongruous with its surroundings, but they viewed it more as an exotic addition than an alien intrusion. Indicatively, in one of his later Lake District books, Baddeley declared Tarn Hows 'one of the most lovely [scenes] in the District' (1942, 136). At Thirlmere, by contrast, he deplored the 'thick fringe of trees' that obstructed the view of 'the lake' (1942, 85).

The difference between these two assertions is revealing. It suggests that the enduring appeal of Marshall's woodland owed something to its original design and thus to the effect of the Wordsworths' ideals. The larch and spruce trees at the property may have remained longer than Marshall had intended, but the way they were planted ensured that they still complemented their setting. Instead of being arrayed in serried ranks, like the plantations at Thirlmere, Marshall's

conifers were arranged in scattered groups, and they were eventually interspersed with broadleaved groves and separated by the spaces he had instructed to be left between them.

The resulting landscape was less rigid and orderly and more naturalistic and picturesque, and in this sense it broadly suited Wordsworth's principles of design. True, the poet was rather fussy about larches. But even he allowed that they could be tolerated if used 'sparingly' in 'rocky' areas, where the uneven ground would 'break' up their 'dreary uniformity' (1810, 59). Acknowledging this point helps explain why a conservationist like Spence, who claimed he looked to Wordsworth's *Guide* as a 'bible' (1937, 240), could lament the changes made at Thirlmere without thereby casting aspersions on Tarn Hows. Although the latter had not been managed in the way Marshall had intended, it still manifested a sensibility that complemented what Spence perceived to be the natural character of the region.

Recognising this also helps explain why Tarn Hows appealed to admirers who, like Cowper, were steeped in the literary history of the Lakes. Tarn Hows may not have had the same sort of direct Wordsworthian associations as places like Hawkshead (which Cowper called 'a Wordsworth shrine' (1899, 48)), but it became a popular attraction nonetheless because it satisfied a vision of the region that the Wordsworths' writings had accustomed the public to expect. The property, to use John Urry's expression, helped consolidate the 'tourist gaze' of the cultured Lake District visitor (1995, 132–33). It provided such visitors with a setting in which to experience what they had come to the region prepared to see. And it has evidently continued to do so closer to our own time. In 1983, the BBC's 'Look North' aired a broadcast of Richard Wordsworth, the poet's great-great grandson, reciting his forebear's poetry at Tarn Hows. The spot may not have inspired any of Wordsworth's poems, but it was nonetheless deemed a suitable backdrop for a performance of his verse.

V.

Tarn Hows has of course been enriched by some more specific literary associations since

Cowper's day. The fairyland-like aspect of the property has inspired episodes in notable works of children's literature, including Marjorie Lloyd's *Fell Farm Campers* (1960) and Arthur Ransome's *Winter Holiday* (1933). But of all the literary figures who have formed connections with Tarn Hows in the past century, none is more important than Beatrix Potter.

Potter, who purchased the property in 1930, found the landscaping 'too theatrical' for her taste. She said it looked 'like scene painting' (Taylor 1989, 323). And she was scandalised by the immodesty of those tourists who took to the waters. '*Bathing*', she harrumphed, 'is most perplexing' (Taylor 1987, 197). But she was convinced of the value of the Monk Coniston estate, which included Tarn Hows, and she agreed to buy it in partnership with the National Trust.

The Trust already owned several estates in the Lake District, including some which had once belonged to the Marshalls. Portions of the family's lands around Keswick were gifted to the Trust in the 1920s. But the charity was especially keen to ensure the preservation of Tarn Hows. The Forestry Commission, who later acquired land to the north of the site, were another potential buyer, and the Trust needed Potter's support to complete the purchase before it was too late. In article thanking Potter for her generosity, the Trust's chairman John Bailey remarked that 'not one' of the 'many properties' his organisation had 'acquired' in the Lakes 'was better worth saving and holding than this glorious stretch of mountain, moor, and tarn' (Bailey 1930, 8).

Potter's intervention gave the National Trust sufficient time to raise the funds they required. She allowed the Trust to buy the part of the estate that included Tarn Hows at cost shortly after she took possession. But even after the Trust purchased this portion of the property, Potter continued to manage it on the charity's behalf. Potter appreciated the appeal Tarn Hows had for holidaymakers. In a letter to the Trust's secretary Samuel Hamer in 1929, she acknowledged that the property was a 'favourite walk' for the visiting public (qt. Lear 2007, 358). Her interest, however, was more in agricultural improvement than in providing amenities

for tourists. She dedicated herself to improving the farms and herds of the tenants who worked on the estate. Her correspondence with the National Trust during her stewardship of the site attests to the long hours she and her husband William invested in repairing walls and fences, refurbishing tenant cottages, protecting stock, and guarding the property from the damage caused by careless visitors (Lear 2007).

In addition to ensuring Tarn Hows's preservation, these labours added a new dimension to the literary associations of the site. Like the Wordsworths before her, Potter's actions imbued Tarn Hows with a cultural significance it otherwise would not possess. But even more so than the Wordsworths, who simply inspired Marshall's designs, Potter directly affected the preservation of the property. Her management of the Monk Coniston estate demonstrates how the work of literary figures can go beyond mere influence to effect a lasting change.

And the benefit of Potter's work has indeed been long lasting. Aspects of her legacy can still be seen at Tarn Hows today, including in the Belted Galloways that graze the fells around the property. Galloways were one of Potter's preferred breeds (Lear 2007, 392). Thanks to Potter's actions, moreover, the National Trust was eventually able to take full ownership of Tarn Hows and its surroundings. She bequeathed the remaining portion of the Monk Coniston estate to the charity in her will. The Trust added a circuit path around the tarn shortly after taking possession, and the charity has since endeavoured to increase the property's accessibility while conserving its historical character.

Conserving a landscape like Tarn Hows is no easy task, and the National Trust has recently undertaken a programme of works that aim to restore aspects of Marshall's designed landscape while still responding to the needs and demands of our time. Some of these needs are cultural, but many are environmental. The recent clearances carried out to combat the spread of *phytophthora ramorum* is one case in point, as is the ongoing task of managing the impact caused by the hundreds of thousands of people who visit the site every year. The property has, moreover, been a designated Site of Special Scientific Interest since the 1960s, and so the efforts taken to

preserve its integrity carry added weight.

But ultimately such efforts serve to remind us that, for all its beauty, Tarn Hows is about as natural as Kew Gardens. The property is the product of a long history of human interventions, and its landscape has been shaped and moulded in ways that reflect its connection with some of the region's most famous writers. A manmade paradise, it may be too pretty to suit every visitor. But, whether one likes it or not, it is an embodiment of the Lake District's character as a cultural landscape: a place mutually formed by the forces of nature and humankind. It may not be a conventional literary property, but it is a place that proves the power of literary figures to affect lasting changes in the world.

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