'A faint whiff of cigar': The literary tourist's experience of visiting writers' homes

Nicola MacLeod

Faculty of Business, University of Greenwich, Queen Anne Court, Park Row, Greenwich, London, United Kingdom SE10 9LS

n.e.macleod@gre.ac.uk

ORCID ID. https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7504-2270

Abstract

Places associated with authors and their literary creations are popular attractions and amongst the most compelling of these literary tourism sites are writers' homes where visitors can gain personal insights into their favourite artists. However, there are few studies on the experience of literary tourists in these settings and this paper addresses this gap by analyzing 1200 TripAdvisor reviews of four well-known English and American literary homes using Leximancer software which uses a quantitative approach to carry out qualitative analysis of text. The conceptual framework of the *genius loci* was used to inform this analysis of the literary visitor experience. The findings revealed that for these literary visitors, the domestic setting was the most important aspect of the visit, coupled with the knowledge gained and the experience of being in proximity to the creative process itself. Further thematic analysis also revealed that visitors were keen to seek out authentic, personal objects and sensed the presence of the deceased author within the house. The article concludes that the notion of the *genius loci* – the presiding spirit of place – is a useful way of conceptualizing the literary visitor's experience of author's homes and informing their presentation and management as visitor attractions.

Keywords

Literary tourism, literary tourist, writer's house, Leximancer, TripAdvisor, genius loci

Introduction

Literature and tourism have a long and close association and visitors continue to seek out literary-themed sites, both real and imaginary. Aligned to cultural, heritage and media-related tourism, (Agarwal & Shaw, 2017) this form of touring employs literary sites and authorial connections to provide a wide variety of experiences for the reader-tourist. Literary tourism resources include authors' birthplaces and graves, imaginative locations, commercial attractions, literary tours, trails and visits to festivals and book-towns (Smith, 2013). These activities are categorized as either author-centred, being linked to writers' lives or text-centred and related to locations that inspired the fictional settings (Watson, 2006; Westover, 2012). There is a long history of engagement with both types of tourism and this interest continues: recent research by Visit Britain suggests that 1 in 4 domestic visitors had visited a literary site in 2016 (Visit Britain, 2017) and that 2% of all inbound tourists to the UK visited a literary, music or media site in 2017 (Visit Britain, 2018). Not included in these figures are the countless visits subliminally induced by associations with a favourite author or text, driven by literature's 'connection with place' (Ousby, 1990, p. 22).

Academic studies in European and North American literary tourism have developed in the last two decades (Hoppen, Brown & Fyall, 2014) with research based in other regions (for example Africa and China) appearing more recently (Smith, 2013; Wang & Zhang, 2017). Studies have focused on literary tourism's volume and value, impacts and management, consumer characteristics and its role in destination image. However, more research is required on visitors' experiences of literary sites (Agarwal & Shaw, 2017) and on how they engage with presented themes. This study will address this gap by exploring the experiences of visitors to the most long-established of literary sites - the writers' house. The authorial home – 'apogee of literary tourist sites' (Watson, 2006, p. 90) - is perhaps the most potent symbol of the writer and their craft. Providing both domestic setting and literary inspiration,

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the house is seen as an expression of inner and outer life and may be read 'as alternative autobiographies or self-portraits' (Hendrix, 2012, p. 4). Historically, interest in literary settings has been strong in both the UK and USA since the early nineteenth century with visitors accompanied by guide books such as the influential Homes and Haunts of the Most Eminent British Poets, (1847) which spawned a literary genre in its own right (Booth, 2016) encouraging visitors to seek out the authorial home and the wider literary landscape.

The first such domestic site was Sir Walter Scott's Abbotsford in the Scottish Borders in 1832 (Watson, 2006). In America, the first writer's home open to the public is believed to be Henry Wadsworth Longfellow's house in Maine which opened in 1901 (Trubek, 2011). Today there are an estimated 50 writers' homes in UK (Young, 2015) and 70 in US (Trubek, 2011) and a growing body of academic literature on the literary home as visitor attraction. Existing studies include the homes of Edgar Allen Poe, USA (Bowers, 2010); Astrid Lindgren, Sweden (Bom, 2015) and Lu Xun, China (Wang & Zhang, 2017). These studies focus on operational, managerial and interpretive challenges with commemoration and nostalgia suggested as powerful stimulants for visitation (Cevik, 2018). This paper therefore augments this existing literature by considering the experience of visitors at these most intimate of literary tourism sites through an exploratory analysis of reviews written by visitors to the homes of renowned American and English writers. Reviews of eight writers' homes in USA and England were collected from TripAdvisor, the largest available review site. A sample of 1200 reviews was analyzed using Leximancer (4.5) software and thematic analysis to explore the visitor experiences of writers' homes which arguably offer the most immediate encounter for the literary tourist. The notion of *genius loci* is then proposed as a useful framework within which the literary visitor experience can be conceptualized.

Literature review

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Literary-inspired tourism has a long history, connected in its early days with Romantic and Grand Touring (MacLeod, Shelley & Morrison, 2018; Ousby, 1990). By the 1820s, visitors were travelling to see William Wordsworth in his Lake District home and Walter Scott's romantic Scottish locations (Aitchison, MacLeod & Shaw, 2002). In the mid-19th century, many of these fans were American visitors to the UK, as exploring literary sites was a popular way to connect with the Old Country and share a literary heritage (Westover, 2009). Home-grown literary sites in the USA were also gaining popularity and by the 1870s, the Florida home of Harriet Beecher Stowe was served by steamboats, providing visitors a glimpse of the author on her veranda (Roberts, 2009). Literary visitors had a long history of arriving uninvited at authors' homes in the hope of spotting the living artist, but ultimately, the transition of writers' homes into fully-fledged visitor attractions happened posthumously.

The writers' home

The writers' home is arguably the most powerful and intimate literary site (Robinson, 2002; Westover, 2012) as it offers an authentic connection with the author and their output, being as Watson (2006, p. 90) suggests, the 'workshop of genius'. The authenticity of the tourist experience has a substantial literature (e.g. Cohen, 1988; MacCannell, 1976; Wang, 1999) and Wang's (1999) influential study suggests that the concept of authenticity can relate to sites and artefacts that are objectively verified, that are accepted as genuine over time or are existentially authentic in that they feel real to those living the experience. As niche attractions, writers' homes offer a full range of authentic experience and Busby and Shetliffe (2013) propose that the reasons for visiting are both intellectual and emotional. Thus, visitors believe that knowledge of the author's domestic life contributes to our understanding of the work (Santesso, 2004) and that the house reflects the author's tastes and literary inspiration (Smith, 2013). The physical setting allows the visitor to realize their imaginative consumption of the life and output of the author. In analyzing the home of Swedish children's

author Astrid Lindgren, Bom (2015) notes that the house provides a 'spatial marker' that creates proximity and provides authentic associations with the author herself. Similarly, Orr (2018) describes the literary home as 'a physical medium through which fans can imaginatively engage in their search for connection' (p. 253).

The earliest literary tourist guides were produced within what has become known as the homes and haunts genre, named after William Howlitt's *Homes and Haunts of the Most Eminent British Poets* first published in London in 1847 (Booth, 2016). This collection of essays guided the visitor around the houses and locales that nurtured and inspired famous writers. The term haunts here refers to places that the author frequented but as the artists were invariably deceased by the time the guide was written, the more spectral meaning of haunting also comes into play. The homes and haunts guide therefore placed specific emphasis on the home as domestic refuge and the wider milieu as inspiration for the author. The aligned sense of a haunted space also suggests the spirit of literary greatness which may still reside within the writer's home and animate the setting for subsequent visitors.

Brown and Gentile (2015) refer to the symbiotic relationship between writers and their houses, stating that homes and locales '…can be defined as memoriae loci, places of remembrance resulting from the transformation of life into literature and vice versa.' (p.29). However, authors also identify a more immediate need to establish an emotional connection (Hoppen et al., 2014; Orr, 2018). This imperative may be stronger in sites reflecting the nostalgia of childhood reading where the visitor seeks, not only the author, but their own younger selves (Squire, 1994). In particular, the homely setting provides immediate contact with the author where intact objects allow us to access the life and work of the deceased artist with artefacts acting as compensation for their loss (Trubek, 2011).

Authentic possessions play a key role in the presentation of authors' homes, offering the visitor a chance for intimacy but as Robinson (2002) suggests, no articles are as meaningful as those associated with the writers' craft itself. Thus, books, desks and pens are particularly valued, providing a 'sacred hagiography' of the writer (p.10). The authenticity of such exhibits is discussed in several studies (e.g. Booth, 2016; Hunter, 2015) and Crang (2003) describes visitors to Jane Austen's home in Chawton, ignoring rules on touching her table, so great was their need for contact with such a hallowed surface. In her work on the role of objects within writers' houses, Hunter (2015, p. 3) refers to their resonance in bringing the absent into the present, suggesting that 'they are evocative things that presence both the absent individual with whom they are associated and the world they inhabited in their lifetime.'

As showcases of creativity, the domestic setting and writers' tools allows the visitor to focus on the centre-point of the author's creativity. This is easier to discern if an author had a dedicated study, away from domestic activity. These rooms are revered as 'detachable chapels or reliquaries of writing' (Booth, 2016, p. 57) and examples of such enviable work spaces have been noted in the present author's own travels (e.g. Vita Sackville West's tower at Sissinghurst and George Bernard Shaw's summerhouse at Shaw's Corner, both being a special focus for visitors within the wider context of the house and grounds).

The recent museological turn towards more naturalistic presentation has also influenced how writers' homes are presented (Robinson, 2002; Smith, 2013). Thus, the auratic possessions discussed above are left out as if in use, rather than displayed in cases. Consequently, it appears that the great woman or man has just stepped out of the room and may be met in person at any time. This sense of a haunted space (Westover, 2012) where the author's spirit still presides over the home is strong and the possibility of a chance encounter with the artist is a key motivation for the visit and one which the presentation of the house may encourage.

The combination of the authentic home, suggestive presentational style and a visitor prepared to put in the necessary 'imaginative effort' can, in effect, resurrect the dead author (Watson, 2006, p. 93). Indeed, Westover (2012) notes that in their journals, early visitors to writers' homes would often affirm the presence of the deceased.

Hoppen et al. (2014) and Watson (2020) suggest that a particularly arresting visitor experience occurs where the place of creation and the fictional setting are the same, thus affording insight into the author's life, creativity and the physical manifestation of a literary setting. This elision of the real and imaginary means that the domestic setting may be haunted by both the author and their fictional creations, providing a vivid visitor experience. However, misapprehensions can happen as Tetley and Bramwell (2004) discovered in their survey of visitors to the Brontës' parsonage in Haworth. Some reported disappointment with the unadorned parsonage, expecting to find the windswept Gothic of the fictional Wuthering Heights. Bonniot-Mirloup (2016) refers to the imaginative augmentation that occurs when the integration of the literary work within the surrounding landscape takes the visitor out into a wider literary domain, perhaps to visit birthplaces or graves. This physical and imaginative extension of the literary milieu reflects the concept of authorial homes and haunts and demonstrates the pervasiveness of literary connections.

The writers' home and the genius loci

The emphasis that is found on both the domestic space, the spiritual presence and the icons of the writer's craft within these academic studies suggests that what the literary visitor is seeking within the authorial home may be the *genius loci*. This 'ancient and rather indistinct' concept (Christou, Farmaki, Saveriades, & Spanou, 2019, p. 19) originates from classical Roman religion and refers not only to the spirits that accompanied humans through life but also to those presiding over places, embodying, protecting and usually holding a symbolic

object. This original definition emphasizes the sacredness and special features of a place (Loukaki, 1997). However, this meaning has changed over time as the spiritual impetus became rational and places were subjected to more technical parameters of measurement and design (Vogler & Vittori, 2006). The term was used, for example, as a guiding principle in Picturesque landscape design in the 18th century, with designers improving upon Nature but doing so with respect to the original place characteristics (J'iven & Larkham, 2003).

The *genius loci* concept is found in religious studies, geography and more recently in architectural theory and urban planning, referring to the spirit of place and suggesting that local context be integrated into the design of urban and rural landscapes (Christou et al., 2019). The concept has also been used in tourism marketing literature to describe a destination brand (Skinner, 2011) and even more recently applied to gaming design, referring to spirits both inhabiting and representing virtual worlds (Bidwell & Browning, 2008). However, as Christou et al. (2019) suggest, the notion of *genius loci* has received little academic attention outside the geographical-architectural perspective and could shed valuable light on how people attach meaning to place.

In this paper, the original sense of the term is used to denote the particular qualities that literary houses may hold for visitors. The studies discussed above suggest that these sites incorporate the spirit of the author presiding over the domestic setting with the tools of their trade valued as both shorthand for their literary output and as compensation for the absence of a bodily form. Allied to this is the 'concentrated accretion of meaning and experience' which the *genius loci* represents as Cheeke suggests in relation to the lure of Byronic literary sites (1999, p. 38). The concept of *genius loci* therefore appears to be aligned to the homes and haunts trope which has informed the presentation and visitation of literary homes for many years. Consequently, this study proposes that this is a useful approach to evaluating the experience of contemporary literary house visitors who seek the domestic setting, symbolic

objects and the presence of the deceased artist - these three aspects of the visit being displayed in Figure 1. Thus, the analysis of themes initially derived from visitors' reviews by Leximancer was informed by this conceptual framework. In addition, thematic analysis of the texts was undertaken to further explore these three proposed dimensions of the visitor experience.

[Figure 1 near here]

Methods and materials

This qualitative study takes an interpretivist, inductive approach to analyzing the experiences of visitors to American and English writers' homes as reported on the major travel review site, TripAdvisor. User-generated online content found on weblogs, social media platforms and review sites is ubiquitous and an influential source of information for trip-planning (Filieri, 2016). User-generated content is defined as published and accessible material, showing creative effort and having been produced outside the writer's own professional routines (Vigolo & Negri, 2015). The data generated by such sites is rich, detailed and well-organized (Guo Sun, Schuckert & Law, 2016) and consequently, since around 2004, such online platforms have increasingly been used in academic studies (Lee & Hu, 2004). Researchers are discovering the varied possibilities inherent in using this material (Chiu & Leng, 2017), accessing this readily available data to evaluate opinions, motivations and experiences of a host of tourism services and products (Schuckert, Liu & Law, 2015).

Online reviews are considered the most influential and popular component of tourism-related social media (Safaaa, Housni, & Bédard, 2017) and are used extensively in research. However, in their systematic literature review of relevant publications, Schuckert et al. (2015) discovered that existing studies of online reviews tended to be quantitative with only a small proportion using content analysis. Only 8% of the studies reviewed were conceptual in

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nature and the authors concluded that this research is clearly focused on hospitality with attractions and destinations ignored. Recent research which addresses this lack includes Safaaa et al.'s (2017) article on authenticity in Marrakech and Kolar's (2019) analysis of sight-running tour reviews.

There are no existing studies of writers' house reviews which is perhaps surprising given the literary tourists' assumed affinity with the written word and the likelihood that their reviews would repay investigation. This paper therefore attempts to address this gap by using the wealth of online reviews available on TripAdvisor to explore the experiences of visitors to a sample of English and American writers' homes. TripAdvisor is the world's biggest source of online reviews, currently holding 702 million entries and attracting 420 million unique visitors each month (TripAdvisor, 2019). It is therefore considered to a credible source (Cong, Wu, Morrison, Shu & Wang, 2014) both for users and researchers who trust the non-commercial, peer-to peer nature of the information. However, some commentators note that there are limitations to using these sites with subjectivity and lack of background information on both the reviewer and the context being suggested as drawbacks (Ayeh, Au & Law, 2013). The self-selected bias inherent in reviews also means that they tend to be negative with reviewers being more motivated to post complaints than commendations (Ngelambong, Kibat, Azmi, Nor & Saien, 2016) although this is not always the case as the results here demonstrate.

The study focused on 8 American and English writers' houses open to the public as visitor attractions. The purposive sample included the homes of writers of similar renown who are considered part of the classical literary canon, and whose birth dates spanned the years 1775-1875. Equal numbers of male and female writers' homes were included in the sample. All eight authors wrote in English and the reviews gathered were also written in English.

1200 reviews from the 8 houses were taken from TripAdviser: 150 reviews were collected for each house starting from those posted on 10 May 2017 and working backwards. The total word count for the reviews was 102 529 words (50 901 for USA reviews; 51 628 for UK reviews). The average length of the reviews was 85 words. All the reviews collected were written in English and were appropriate to the study, so no rejections were necessary. The data was prepared by creating a spreadsheet with a code number for each review. Information about the reviewers' nationality was noted (where available) and the star rating out of 5 which they awarded to the site was also collected. Additional information on the ownership and presentational style of each of the writer's home was gathered to provide context for the review data (Table 1). The text from the 1200 reviews was then entered into a Word file ready for analysis.

[Table 1 near here].

Leximancer (4.5) text analytics software was then used to analyze the content of the TripAdvisor reviews. This relatively new software uses a quantitative approach to carry out qualitative analysis of text. It allows the content of textual material to be analyzed and visually displayed. The visual output is a map that highlights the most significant concepts found within texts and the relationships between them. Thus, Leximancer allows researchers to conduct both conceptual and relational content analysis (Leximancer, 2018). The benefits that this tool has over other qualitative software is its ability to explore large amounts of text and to produce concepts and themes promptly and in a visual format (Wu, Pearce & Dong, 2017).

Leximancer was first employed in social sciences and health research and its usefulness in literature reviews was also recognized early (Tseng, Wu & Morrison, 2015). However, it has been increasingly used by tourism researchers, for example Wu, Wall and Pearce's (2014)

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evaluation of tourist reviews of Beijing Silk Market and Cheng's (2016) research note on media discourse of the tourism sharing economy. A particular benefit of Leximancer is its ability to analyze data with little or no human involvement, reducing the possibility of researcher-bias which is a critique frequently made of qualitative studies (Kolar, 2017). It was therefore selected as an appropriate method for this study, as it allowed the exploratory analysis of a considerable body of text. Leximancer's basic units for analysis are word, concept and theme and these are produced to progress understanding of the 'conceptual structure of texts' (Leximancer, 2018, p. 3).

This is first achieved by identifying a ranked list of concepts derived by calculating the frequency and co-occurrence of words within the text, concepts being defined as 'collections of words that generally travel together throughout the text' (Leximancer, 2018, p. 9). Secondly, Leximancer produces a thesaurus of words that are closely linked to the concepts and which provide semantic and relational context (Chiu, Bae & Won, 2017). Finally, Leximancer groups the concepts into themes based on how often they are found together in the text. The final stage is the production of the concept map, showing the concepts as grey nodes grouped within their clustered themes. These themes, described by Kolar as 'constellations of the related concepts' (2017, p. 1328) are indicated by coloured circles with the warmer hues representing the most important themes within the text. Along with the colour-coding, additional insight is also provided by the relative positions of concepts and themes within the map – those that are in closer proximity have stronger semantic and relational connections (Chiu & Tseng, 2018).

Fifty-seven concepts were identified by Leximancer at the first stage of analysis but before the data could be analyzed, some preliminary fine-tuning was carried out to improve the validity of the conceptual maps (Wu, Pearce & Dong, 2017). This involved correcting spelling mistakes and merging concepts with identical meanings (e.g. room, rooms). After

this initial work was carried out, 53 concepts were retained. These concepts are grouped into themes with Table 2 showing the five most significant. A further Leximancer analysis was carried out with 2 individual houses to allow a deeper examination of a sample of sites.

In addition to the Leximancer analysis, the researcher carefully read each review several times to carry out thematic analysis, a method for identifying patterns and themes within data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Previous studies have also included thematic analysis to accompany the Leximancer findings (Kolar, 2017; Wu et al., 2014) and here, this approach allowed supplementary insights related to the genius loci paradigm to be explored. This stage was included as some of the ideas being explored were expressed in diverse ways by reviewers and were only uncovered by close and repeated reading. Thus, thematic analysis 'demonstrates its suitability in situations where a concept is cloaked in linguistic ambiguity and/or is subject to social, cultural and temporal variations' (Walters, 2016, p. 107). A small number of codes was therefore developed in association with the themes presented in Figure 1.

Findings and analysis

The eight sites under analysis are all open to the public and presented as writers' homes. They represent a mixture of public, private and charitable status and are found in both rural and urban settings (Table 1). The sites attracted a largely domestic tourist market and where visitors were from overseas, half were from the USA (in UK sites) and half from the UK (in US sites). This is not surprising given the shared literary heritage. Each reviewer evaluated their experience and was highly satisfied with their visit. Fewer than 1% of visitors scored their visit at 1* and in these cases, there were operational issues which resulted in the low rating rather than their overall experience of the house itself.

Leximancer generated themes

The five most significant themes generated by Leximancer 4.5 from the reviews are: 'house';
'visit'; 'tour'; 'gardens' and 'experience' with their respective number of 'hits' (or counts)
represented in Table 2 below.

[Table 2 near here]

[Figure 2 near here]

The theme of 'house' is unsurprisingly central to the reviews and the conceptual map also
reveals the close connection between the five themes with high levels of overlap (Figure 2).
Central to the theme of 'house' are the concepts of *people, full, things, family, feel, home* and
lived giving a clear sense of the house being considered primarily as a home with references
to inhabitants and their belongings an important aspect as the following quotations
demonstrate:

'The décor is painstakingly re-created… and Dickens' family's possessions and
contemporary artefacts are abundant. It feels so "lived in" that it seems as though Charles
Dickens had just popped out for one of his walks' (CD88).

'Visiting …the home of the Alcott family, is a pilgrimage for many people, especially women
who remember Little Women being their favourite book growing up' (LA20).

Robinson (2002) and Westover (2012) proposed that the writer's home is the most immediate
and personal of all literary sites and it seems clear that reviewers interpreted them primarily
as domestic settings. Thus, the personal details which were so central to the notion of homes
and haunts visiting and which forms one of the three aspects of the *genius loci* model (Figure
1) are clearly important for visitors.

The overall sense is one of gratification with concepts such as wonderful, interesting and
enjoyed being associated with this theme. This is unsurprising given the high ratings awarded

across all the writers' homes (Table 1). Visitors stated that it was: 'Very interesting to see how a favourite author from my childhood lived' (MT47) and 'what you get here is a wonderful impression of how the house looked in Jane Austen's time' (JA1).

The second major theme is 'visit' which is unsurprisingly associated with concepts related to the setting itself such as *place, museum, trip* and *site*, but the theme also includes the concept *worth* as illustrated in the following quotations: 'Well worth a visit...The house is interesting being the former home of Rudyard Kipling' (RK101) and 'we found the Charles Dickens Museum to be educational, enlightening and well worth our visit to London' (CD64). The idea of the visit being worthwhile was related to both time and money spent and this is again to be expected, given the high levels of visitor satisfaction recorded.

The theme of 'tour' is associated with *guide, history, knowledgeable, home* and also with *period* and *original*. Reviewers commented that: 'The guide was excellent and very informative. Most of the furnishings are original to the home' (LA81) and 'the history of the building, combined with the knowledge of our guide, made this a truly memorable visit' (NH64). Thus, the interpretive mechanism of the tour was valued for the knowledge it imparted and for highlighting authentic aspects of the historic period presented. This information gained from an author's domestic setting is valued as it contributes to our understanding of the literary output itself (Santesso, 2004).

'Gardens' was the next significant theme and is strongly associated with positive concepts such as *lovely, nice, beautiful, area* and *grounds*. The concepts of *cafe* and *shop* are connected within this theme as a walk in the garden and a visit to the shop and cafe are popular activities that take place post-visit: 'The gardens are very nice…whilst the water-mill is worth the five minute walk. There is a good tea shop for all the usual refreshments' (RK105). Another visitor wrote that 'we could have remained in the gardens forever… So

beautiful, quiet and peaceful' (JA33). The gardens and grounds of a literary site are clearly an important aspect of the visit and demonstrate the wider literary milieu (Bonniot-Mirloup, 2016) which is central to the homes and haunts convention of writers finding inspiration in their wider surroundings as well as their domestic sphere. In particular, gardens and neighbourhoods are considered part of the extended literary landscape.

The final theme of 'experience' shares many concepts with the 'house' theme and has a direct link to the concept of *writing* suggesting that experiencing the creative setting is an important aspect of the visit. Reviewers wrote that 'always being a fan of the Brontë sisters' novels, this was a Must Do experience. I found it very emotional…looking at the table, set out with writing equipment, knowing that the authors wrote the novels I love in that very room' (B8) and 'a very enjoyable experience to reminisce the story of Anne of Green Gables, to tour the house, barn, and grounds' (LM76). Thus, the house may be a reference point or 'marker' through which to experience the creative act of writing itself as Bom (2015) suggests above.

Thematic analysis of reviews

In addition to the Leximancer (4.5) analysis, the author also carried out a stage of thematic analysis to further explore ideas round the *genius loci* premise. It was apparent from the Leximancer findings that interpreting the authors' house as a home with associations of family and authentic possessions was a significant aspect of the visit. This theme forms one of the three features of the *genius loci* triad (Figure 1). As the other two aspects (authorial spirit and the aura of the writers' tools) did not appear as key concepts, it was considered useful to further explore these areas by close textual reading.

[Table 3 near here]

Experiencing the spiritual presence of the author is central to studies of writers' homes (e.g. Booth, 2016; Watson, 2006; Westover, 2012) and was apparent during the close reading of

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the reviews. There were a number of references to being haunted and to feeling the presence of the author (these code words were *aura, presence, spirit, haunted*, Table 3), for example: 'You really felt Jane Austen's presence,' (JA110) 'lovers of Dickens' stories are sure to feel his aura throughout the house' (CD45) and 'I love this place - you can feel the spirit of the Alcotts when you visit' (LA145).

One visitor even reported feeling a spiritual presence in the Brontë family home: 'One bedroom was so much colder than the other rooms…not a nice atmosphere, something was obviously hanging around there. I shot through that room!' (B32).

Other visitors were haunted not only by the spirit of the author but by their characters too (this was particularly noticeable in the Alcott and Montgomery homes which were closely associated with their novels), for example: 'Feel Anne's presence and experience her experience' (LM101) and 'walking into the Alcott house is like walking into Little Women… you can almost see the girls practising plays and talking to each other (LA99).' Thus, the imaginative elision between the real and the imaginary which Hoppen et al. (2014) suggest may provide the most satisfying literary experience is found within the reviews.

Interestingly, given the idea of a felt absence in the literary home (Hunter, 2015), quite a number of visitors expressed the sense of presence as a recent absence by stating that they felt as if the author had just stepped out momentarily, for example: 'You get a sense of Dickens himself having just left the room' (CD54) and 'you develop a feeling that at any moment he will walk in the front door and overwhelm you with a story' (MT25).

One visitor even felt they could still smell the lingering aroma of Mark Twain's tobacco - 'The best room by far is the billiard room… you can still get a faint whiff of cigar' (MT23). The willingness to put in the imaginative work (Watson, 2006) necessary to bring the author into being is clear in such statements.

The theme of authorial tools was also explored and the code words *table, desk, study* and *pen/pencil* were developed (Table 3). These code words were used 111 times and were often coupled with comments regarding the authenticity of the artefacts and musings that the visitor could imagine the authors at their desk working on a cherished novel, for example: 'This is the actual house and the actual furniture. What a thrill to see the room and desk where Louisa May Alcott wrote Little Women' (LA2) and 'for me, the best thing was a small oak table, with stains on it and a crack down the middle. Because it was at this very small, humble table that Jane wrote her novels' (JA111). As crucibles of literary creativity, these writerly artefacts are treated by reviewers with reverence.

Feeling the specific presence of the author (in particular reporting on their perception of the author's spirit or the sense that they had just left the room) was equally as strong as the visitors' appreciation and awe of the authentic desk or table where works were created. Both these themes are important in terms of their similar frequency of occurrence and in the strength and warmth of the language used to describe the experience.

A deeper analysis of a sample of two of the houses was then undertaken in order to explore reviews within a more focused context. Thus, short case studies of the Alcott and Dickens houses are presented below.

Case study: Orchard House in Concorde, Massachusetts, USA

Orchard House is the family home of Louisa M Alcott. The house opened to the public in 1912 and is owned and run by a charitable association and listed on the National Register of Historic Landmarks.

The house is a detached grey clapboard home in a garden setting and is presented as a naturalistic domestic interior incorporating kitchen, dining room, drawing room, Louisa's

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bedroom, family bedrooms and nursery. The house contains many personal artefacts (80% of the furnishings are authentic) and the displays include Louisa's writing desk and original artwork by her sister May. It is in this house that Alcott's most famous work Little Women was written in 1868.

Adult admission is US $12.50 and the house can only be visited by guided tour. This means that the levels of signage and interpretation are kept to a minimum. The site includes a gift shop and special events and workshops for school, community and adult education groups are offered. Leximancer analysis of the 150 reviews of Orchard House revealed 41 themes, the top 6 being presented in Figure 3 with their respective number of 'hits' (or counts) represented in Table 4 below.

[Figure 3 near here]

[Table 4 near here]

The most dominant theme from the Orchard House reviews was 'tour' which is unsurprising given that a tour is compulsory to the visit and that this theme was also significant in the combined reviews. As we saw earlier, the positive associations are noteworthy as this theme is linked to the concepts of interesting, knowledgeable, loved and to specific associations with the Alcott family and the sense of a family home. The second most important theme is 'Little Women,' the book for which Alcott is most famous and which was written in the house. This demonstrates the clear elision between the house and the literary setting itself with one reviewer describing their visit as 'a walk through Little Women' (LA119). Thus, the theme 'Little Women' is linked to real places (for example the concepts *Orchard House*, *Concord, lived* and *life*) to the act of reading and writing (*read, book(s), wrote*) and to positive concepts such as wonderful, worth and fans. The third most important theme is 'original' which is linked to concepts such as *preserved, furnishings and artefacts*. This is

unsurprising given the high level of authentic objects available in the house. The concept *sister* is interesting here and is particularly linked to the original artworks painted on the wall by Alcott's sister May which are valued in their own right, but also because fans know that the character Amy was based on this real-life sister. The remaining three themes are 'enjoyed' which is linked to the concept of *fan*, for example 'as an Alcott fan visiting Orchard House was a lifelong dream for me… an enjoyable trip back in time' (LA119). The final two themes of 'gift' and 'trip' relate to the visitors recommending the gift shop and the overall visit (Lee & Kennedy, 2020; Louisa May Alcott's Orchard House, 2020).

Case study: The Charles Dickens Museum at 48 Doughty Street in London, UK

The Charles Dickens Museum is the family home of Dickens in London. It opened to the public in 1925 by an independent trust and is now a registered charity. The house is a typical Georgian terrace built of London stock brick. There is a small courtyard garden at the back of the house which accommodates the café. The house is presented naturalistically with a series of furnished rooms including dining room, drawing room, bedrooms, servants' quarters below stairs and Charles' study described as 'the centre of the house' (Charles Dickens Museum, 2020).   Original, personal artefacts on display include Dickens's desk, handwritten drafts of novels, a lock of the author's hair and a suit of his clothes. The room are dressed in original furniture, portraits and ornaments. He wrote Oliver Twist, Pickwick Papers and Nicholas Nickleby in the house (Charles Dickens Museum, 2020; Macaskill &Schweizer, 2011).

Admission is £9.50 and the visit is generally self-guided although special tours can be booked. The site includes a gift shop and lectures and performances are regularly offered. The house holds a large Dickens research library and school workshops and postgraduate study opportunities are offered.

Leximancer analysis of the 150 reviews of Dickens House revealed 39 themes, the top 6 being presented in Figure 4 with their respective number of 'hits' (or counts) represented in Table 4 above.

[Figure 4 near here]

This shows that the most dominant theme was unsurprisingly 'Dickens' given the name of the site and reviewers' reference to the author himself. This theme is associated with very positive concepts such as *interesting, informative* and *fan* and with the personal life of the author: *life, lived* and *family*. The next theme is 'visit' (which also appears as a theme in the combined reviews). This theme is associated with concepts such as *London* and *Christmas* (with people commenting that the visit was a highlight of their trip to London and that Christmas was a popular time to visit). The concept of *time* was also important ('stepping back in time', CD53), *man* (relating to Dickens as a family man as well as a famous author as in, 'Intimate little insight into Dickens the family man,' CD15), and positive concepts such as *worth* and *wonderful*. The remaining themes were 'Room' which were related to the concepts of *author, history* and *home*. Visitors spoke of the intimacy and atmosphere of the apartments: 'each room is full of history', (CD4) but also of 'memories and fascinating stories' (CD130). The next three themes are Lovely' (related to *friendly, enjoyed* and *wonderful*), 'Staff' (linked to *helpful*) and finally 'Excellent' which is related directly to the concept of *recommend* and emphasizes that visitors were very satisfied with their visit and likely to recommend it.

The analysis of the two individual sites echo the overall analysis with its reference to the themes of 'tour' and 'visit'. However, looking at the sites individually also allows for a more nuanced and personal overview with particular emphasis on the literary works themselves and the intimacy and authenticity of the writers' home.

The 1200 reviews clearly show that visitors experience the literary site as domestic setting, full of original possessions and redolent of its former inhabitants and their creative outputs. The experience is one of enjoyment and wonder but they also value the knowledge and detail provided by guides and find the visit a worthwhile way to spend time and money. A close reading of the reviews also reveals that there is evidence that the notion of the genius loci with its integration of domestic setting, spiritual presence and symbolic artefacts may be an illuminating means of conceptualizing the experience of literary house visitors.

Conclusion

Having identified a scarcity of studies of literary visitors' experiences of writers' houses and of the use of user-generated content within this context, this study set out to explore the key themes emanating from visitor reviews of eight notable authors' homes. The literature review suggested to the author that, informed by the homes and haunts trope, the concept of *genius loci* might be a useful framework within which to analyze the themes found within the reviews, this concept having not yet been fully exploited in studies of tourism and place (Christou et al., 2019). The findings indicate that the literary visitor is largely a domestic traveller who is highly satisfied with their visit. This enthusiasm is conveyed in reviews which are expressive, emotive and detailed.   The key themes emanating from these reviews focus on the literary house as family home full of authentic possessions. The 5-star ratings are augmented here by the references to enjoyment and wonder within the reviews. The themes associated with the visit are linked to the practicalities of taking a trip, but the reviewers also considered that the visit itself was worthwhile in terms of time and cost. The theme of tour was also dominant reflecting the nature of the interpretation used. This theme clearly demonstrates that knowledge is the key value to be gained from taking a tour. The gardens and grounds surrounding the houses also formed a significant theme and these were appreciated as both an extension to the literary setting and as a place to rest. Finally, the

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theme of experience was also key- this was particularly connected to the emotional response to seeing where works were written.

Further analysis of the *genius loci* concept suggested that visitors particularly sought out objects associated with the writer's craft with reverence given to these auratic exhibits which inspired visitors to imagine them in use. Watson suggests that 'tourists actively seek out the anti-realist experience of being haunted' (2006, p. 174) and the concept of the presiding spirit was certainly found within the reviews with visitors clearly recording their willingness to suspend disbelief and feel the presence of the absent author. The experience of the literary home is indeed intellectual and emotional (Busby & Shetliffe, 2013) with the house being consumed as both museum and haunted space. Peopled by biography, imaginary characters and personal memories of past readings, the literary home is thus 'both psychical and physical, this inter-subjective, inter-textual, intra-psychic space, a blur of inside turned outside and back again, where thinking may hold and be held momentarily by the thoughts/relics/traces of another' (Robertson & Radford, 2009, p. 204).

This study contributes to the academic literature by exploring an under-researched aspect of literary tourism using a large sample of reviews of well-known sites. It also demonstrates the value of analyzing the impact of historical modes of visitation and place evaluation on the contemporary literary visitor experience. However, there are limitations to the study in that the sites are associated solely with the Anglo/American literary tradition and further research exploring other regions would be illuminating. Visitor review data is considered an enlightening source for academic research but is limited by its self-selected nature – in this study the reviews were almost exclusively positive and those with more negative views may have chosen not to review their experience.

It is seen that the literary house provides a visitor experience that is qualitatively different to that of the generic visitor attraction. In particular, it is clear that visitors to literary homes appreciate domestic detail, the spiritual presence of the artist and authentic belongings which have an aura which transcends the everyday household object. Thus, a naturalistic setting and interpretive scheme may be the best fit for visitors to these literary settings. Managers of literary homes should therefore emphasize the three components of the *genius loci* in both the marketing and interpretation of literary settings, ensuring access to authentic objects and allowing space and time for visitors' imaginations to roam freely. The literary traveller has been seen to value the knowledge that a literary house tour offers but factual detail should also be tempered by opportunities for visitors to feel and commune with the *genius loci* – the spirit of the place.

Destinations and regions continue to promote literary themes and as writers' houses are the bedrock of traditional literary tourism, it is vital to understand the experience of visitors to these very intimate and resonant places. This is an under researched field but a greater awareness of the nature of the visitor encounter will not only enhance their experience of literary houses but will contribute to the development of literary themes across a wider array of settings. What is clear is that the homes of authors cannot be considered as merely a subset of heritage attractions or indeed of the homes of famous figures. The writer's house materializes reading and combines the imaginary with the real in a manner that is unique within the wider visitor attraction sector. An understanding of this experience can therefore contribute to more effective management and interpretation of these key sites.

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