

Interpreting UK Literary Houses through Post-Writer Histories

Dr. James Pardoe
University of Chester
UK

Abstract

By exploring case studies from the UK, this paper investigates how post-writer histories of literary houses impact on the interpretation of the lives and works of associated writers. The boundaries of this paper have been dictated by its place within twenty-first century manifestations of the survival, conservation and reproduction of literary houses associated with three writers active in the early nineteenth century: Lord Byron, John Keats and Sir Walter Scott. Many of the works within the literary house genre highlight the significance of the link between writers and their audiences. However, whereas commentators concentrate on the links being direct, this paper shows that the association is based on narratives filtered through those who were subsequently responsible for the houses. Consequently, the interpretation prevalent in the houses in the twenty-first century are the result of a long history based on the writers, and what was considered their significance by others over approximately two hundred years.

Keywords: Literary, Houses, Interpretation, Aura, Authenticity

Introduction

There is an extensive literature produced on house visiting. Indeed, contemporary scholarship which addresses houses associated with famous people can be recognised across a range of disciplines, one example being literary tourism which analyses audience motivation and experience.¹ In particular, the discussions surrounding why houses should be associated with writers to represent their lives and works is a subject which has attracted a good deal of interest across a number of disciplines. For example, two of the case studies which feature in this paper, Abbotsford and Newstead, are the subjects of studies in architecture and design,² Victorian chivalry,³ country houses,⁴ biography and celebrity,⁵ and tourism.⁶

¹ Richard Butler, 'Literature as an influence in shaping the image of tourist destinations', in Marsh, J (ed) *Canadian Studies of Parks, Recreation and Tourism in Foreign Lands* (Canada: Department of Geography, Trent University, 1986), pp.111-132.

Graham Busby and Julia Klug, 'Movie induced tourism: the challenge of measurement and other issues', *Journal of Vacation Marketing*, 7:4 (October 2001), pp.316-332, Alastair Durie, 'The Development of Scotland as a Tourist Destination', in *Tourism – The State of the Art* ed. by A.V. Seaton (Chichester: John Wiley and Sons, 1994), pp. 494-499, Birgit Trauer and Chris Ryan, 'Destination, image, romance and place experience – an application of intimacy theory in tourism', *Tourism Management*, Volume 26, Issue 4 (August 2002), pp. 481-491.

Clare Fawcett and Patricia Cormack, 'Guarding authenticity at literary tourism sites', *Annals of Tourism Research*, Volume 28, Issue 3, (2001), pp.686-704.

² Brown, I (ed) *Abbotsford and Sir Walter Scott – The Image and the Influence* (Edinburgh: Society of Antiquaries, 2003), Girouard, M *The Victorian Country House* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979).

³ Girouard, M *The Return to Camelot: Chivalry and the English Gentleman* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981).

⁴ Mandler, P *The Fall and Rise of the Stately Home* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1997), Tinniswood, AA *History of Country House Visiting* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), Tinniswood, A *The Polite Tourist: Four Centuries of Country House Visiting* (London: National Trust, 1998).

⁵ Parke, C *Biography - Writing Lives* (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), Eisner, E *Nineteenth-Century Poetry and Literary Celebrity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), Mole, T (ed) *Romanticism and Celebrity Culture 1750-1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), Higgins, D *Romantic Genius and the Literary Magazine - Biography, celebrity, politics* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), Holmes, R *The Romantic Poets and Their Circle* (London: National Portrait Gallery Publications, 2005), Lee, H *Body Parts - Essays on Life-writing* (London: Chatto and Windus,

Aims

The boundaries of this research have been dictated by its place within twenty-first century manifestations of the survival, conservation and reproduction of literary houses associated with three writers active in the early nineteenth century. This paper focuses on three British writers of the Romantic age, and investigates the three houses which are associated with their names and which are open to the public in the UK today: Lord Byron (Newstead Abbey), John Keats (Keats House), and Sir Walter Scott (Abbotsford House).

The principal aim of this paper is to show how post-writer histories impact on the literary houses today. Post-writer histories are important for a number of reasons. Many of the works within the literary house genre, such as those by Harald Hendrix, Kate Marsh and Nicola Watson, highlight the significance of the link between writers and their audiences.⁷ However, whereas these commentators concentrate on the links being direct - to them this signifies the houses' importance and 'authenticity' - this study aims to show that the association is based on narratives filtered through those who are subsequently responsible for the houses, and how visitors' perception of an aura of the associated writers at these houses influenced the way they have been interpreted. All the houses chosen as case studies here are reproductions to a greater or lesser extent and the spirit of the writers is an important element in the manipulation of understanding who they are.

Sources

Literary house visiting involves different kinds of relations; therefore its analysis necessitates an understanding of the relationship between visitors and writers, writers and houses, and houses and visitors. The study of literary house visiting brings into question certain aspects of the interpretation and reception of the writer at the house. The comprehension of these relationships and questions requires an analysis, in the first place, of the motivations behind owners in opening the houses to the public gaze. Those which began their public lives as private homes, that is, Abbotsford and Newstead, are rich in various forms of private correspondence such as family letters and memoirs, which allow for a picture to be painted of the motivations of the owners in creating literary houses. In addition, this correspondence shows how the structures of the houses developed, in the sense of architectural variations and changes in the location of objects related to the writers. Conversely, the motivation of those who set up Keats House, and the period when Nottingham City Council managed Newstead, as literary destinations can be traced through official documentation held in organisational archives. For Abbotsford, Scott's own motivations in building his house can be accessed through his own memoirs found in his *Journal* and other autobiographical sources such as *Reliquiae Trotcosienses*⁸, and letters sent by Scott and to him. Sources for Newstead include Byron's extensive letters and poetical works which describe the house, activities which took place there and Byron's own feelings towards his ancestral home. At Keats House there are official statements outlining the intentions of those who organised the purchase of the house and memorial publications.

Additional primary sources included guidebooks, contemporary accounts of visits, and visitor books. Guidebooks and visitor books both provide evidence of a public record of visitor profiles and experience of visits.

2005), North, J *The Domestication of Genius - Biography and the Romantic Poet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), Newlyn, L *Reading, Writing and Romanticism - The Anxiety of Reception* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), Speck, W *Literature and Society in Eighteenth-Century England 1680-1820 - Ideology, Politics and Culture* (Harlow: Longman, 1998), Gamur, M *Romanticism and the Gothic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

⁶Durie, Seaton, A, pp. 494-499, Hendrix, Watson (2009), Watson, N *The Literary Tourist - Readers and Places in Romantic & Victorian Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), Marsh, K (ed) *Writers and their Houses - A Guide to the Writers' Houses of England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland - Essays by Modern Writers* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1993).

⁷ Hendrix, Marsh, Watson (2006, 2009).

⁸ Much of the evidence for Abbotsford as a representation of a writer at work in an environment of his own creation, as a material link between the house and his literature, and also a portrait of the writer as a figure in, and a writer of, Scotland's history, is based on Scott's own thoughts on the subject. *Reliquiae Trotcosienses*, one of Scott's last works, although written as a work of fiction, contains detailed descriptions of Abbotsford and its collections, and, in effect, became a catalogue of both. In this work Scott links both his interest in Scotland's history and antiquarianism, and his literature to the building, its collections and their combined meanings. This work was suppressed on Scott's death and although extracts were published in 1889 and 1905, it was not until 2004 that a complete edition was published after the original manuscript was located in the library at Abbotsford. Carruthers, G & Lumsden, A (eds) *Walter Scott - Reliquiae Trotcosienses* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004).

They also indicate what visitors were encouraged to like and see; that is, what the owners emphasised as important in their collections. Further sources can also be accessed, including acquisition and disposal policies. These give an indication of what is considered to be important in terms of collecting which, in turn, highlights what aspects of the writers' lives are the focuses of displays. The nineteenth century saw an increase in the 'homes and haunts' genre of travel writing, with commentators such as William Howitt, Washington Irving, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Theodor Fontane all producing substantial works.⁹ These sources are highly useful as they provide detailed accounts of the houses and their collections at different historical moments and insights into visitor expectation. They also provide evidence which can be cross-referenced with contemporary guidebooks and visitor books.

This research is also concerned with current practice at the houses, including present practices of representation and visitor reception. For sources it is possible to draw on personal experience, collection policies at the houses and interviews carried out with professionals employed at the houses as curators and on-site managers. These are with individuals who have had the greatest impact on decisions regarding interpretation and collection practice in the early twenty-first century.

Case Studies

Scott bought and developed the home he named Abbotsford House between 1811 and his death in 1832.¹⁰ Scott's obsession with Abbotsford and its place as the vehicle of much of his literary work made it a significant literary destination during his lifetime. It has remained open to the public to the present day.¹¹ On his death the house remained in the Scott family who promoted Abbotsford from the outset as the home as Scott had left it, including the furnishings and fittings.¹² With the death of Dame Jean Maxwell-Scott in May 2004 the future of the house was in some doubt as her descendants showed little inclination to continue her work.¹³ However, in 2006 a Trust was formed to undertake the management of the property. Evidence, to date, suggests it will continue in the short term, at least, to be interpreted along the lines maintained by Scott's family for many years.

An early focus for those with an interest in Byron was Newstead Abbey. Byron came into possession of his ancestral home in 1798 (aged ten), selling it nineteen years later. During this time Byron lived there for no more than three years, and made minimal physical impact on the building, although on its sale he did leave a number of personal objects *in situ*.¹⁴ Despite these limited connections a number of accounts attest to the position of Newstead as *the* place to be visited because of its Byron associations.¹⁵

⁹Howitt, W. 1857. *Homes and Haunts of the Most Eminent British Poets - Vol. II*, 2nd edn. London: Richard Bentley.

Howitt, W. 1838. *Rural Life of England Vol. I*. London: Longmans. Irving, W. 1850. *Abbotsford and Newstead Abbey*. London: Henry G.

Bohn, Fontane, T. 1998. *Beyond the Tweed: A Tour of Scotland in 1858*, trans. by Brian Battershaw with an introduction by Charles Jolles,

first published as *Jenseit des Tweed - Bilder und Briefe aus Schottland*, Julius Springer, Berlin 1860. London: Libris., Stewart, R (ed). 1941.

The English Notebooks by Nathaniel Hawthorne (Based upon the original manuscripts in the Pierpont Morgan Library.) New York: Russell and Russell.

¹⁰T. Gifford, 'Sir Walter Scott – The Journey to Abbotsford', in *Abbotsford, The Home of Sir Walter Scott*, ed. by Wright, J (Melrose: Abbotsford, 2007), pp.5-6.

¹¹Ibid. pp.4-36.

¹²See Dibdin, T, II, pp.1008-1012, *Hawthorne, Stewart, R*, pp.341-344, *Abbotsford* by Maxwell-Scott, W, edn, rev. by J. Corson (Abbotsford: Bordernet and Meigle, n.d.) pp. 6-9.

¹³Jacqui Wright, Executive Manager, Abbotsford Trust, interview by James Pardoe, Abbotsford House, 15th August 2007.

¹⁴Known as the Byron Relics.

¹⁵ Irving, Howitt (1857), Howitt, W *Rural Life of England Vol. I* (London: Longmans, 1838), *Hawthorne, Stewart, R, Firth, J Highways and Byways in Nottinghamshire* (London: Macmillan, 1916), Blunt, W *My Diaries 1888-1914, 2 vols.* (London: Secker, 1919), Chew, S *Byron in England - His Fame and After-Fame* (First published 1924: New York: Russell & Russell, 1965 - re-issue), Marchand, L *Byron a Biography* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957), Langley-Moore, D *The Late Lord Byron: A Biography* (London: John Murray, 1961), Elfenbein, A *Byron and the Victorians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), Beckett, J *Byron and Newstead – The Aristocrat and the Abbey* (London: Associated University Press, 2001), Coope, R 'Lord Byron's Newstead: The Abbey and Its Furnishings during the Poet's Ownership, 1798-1817.'

The 200 year history of Newstead since Byron's ownership falls within three distinct phases: the 'Byron House', that is Newstead as created and left by the writer, 1808-1817; the 'Byronic House', that is the private home of two Victorian families of the gentry, incorporating a Byron memorial, 1817-1931; and the 'Museum', that is the visitor destination managed and owned by the City of Nottingham since 1931. Throughout this history the meaning of Newstead has been influenced by the image of Byron as the popular writer and notorious celebrity. The question remains as to what parts of the site are original to the writer and how the answer to this question impacts on the contention that Newstead is *the* iconic Byron site.

Keats rented Wentworth Place, Hampstead in London from 1818 to 1820, where he wrote some of his most critically acclaimed poems, including *Ode to a Nightingale*. This was also the house where he met his fiancée, Fanny Brawne. It was from this house that, suffering from tuberculosis, he left to spend the winter of 1820-21 in Italy, where it was hoped that he would find a cure in the milder climate of Rome.¹⁶ All of these events established strong connections between the writer and the Hampstead house. However, these links were not celebrated for another century, with the house largely remaining out of the public gaze and in private hands until it was threatened with demolition in the 1920s. It was eventually saved by public subscription and opened to the public as a museum in 1925, since when it has been managed by various local government organisations under the name of Keats House. Although it was considered as an important location for the production of Keats's best-known works, little physical evidence of his occupation remained.

Post-Writer Impact

So why are these houses considered to be appropriate interpreters of the identities of the writers? And how have the post-writer histories impacted on these interpretations?

My findings have shown that the long history of Abbotsford as an established literary destination has produced a multi-layered narrative of both Scott and the house. In 'creating' Abbotsford, Scott exploited an emergent interest in the physical links between writers and place. By building the house into a landscape which was already the subject of his writing and then writing about the house that he built, Scott created his own narrative for Abbotsford. In doing so he also created another narrative: namely, the house as a tourist site dedicated to a literary giant during his own lifetime and beyond. These two narratives have been sustained and developed by subsequent owners in their interpretation of the house and the focus of the reception of Abbotsford by visitors since the early nineteenth century - a focus which acknowledges the physical links between the house, the literature and Scott - and have reinforced Abbotsford's position as the pre-eminent Scott literary destination. These narratives have been applied to the house by both visitors and owners in an effort to construct significance for Abbotsford. As a result, Abbotsford has always been considered as *the* site central to an understanding of Scott and his work. Underlying this reputation are issues of authenticity and the perception by some of Abbotsford as a shrine to Scott. Research shows that there are a number of tensions relating to the identity of Abbotsford, tensions which can be traced back to Scott's own vision for his home: is it a literary house and/or an important site of a Scottish history? An analysis of the history of Abbotsford shows the literary narrative to be the dominant image at certain points in time, but there is also evidence which points to the house as portraying Scott's wider interests.

Although the presentation of the house was essentially static from 1832 and 2004, some subtle changes did occur, such as the removal of the Byron urn and Shakespeare bust, reflecting the shifting emphases in interpretation.¹⁷

Transactions of the Thorton Society 91 (1987): 133-54, Marsh, K (1993), MacCarthy, F *Byron – Life and Legend* (London: John Murray, 2002), Watson (2009), Hendrix.

¹⁶Kelvin Everest, 'Keats, John (1795-1821)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2006 [http://www.oxford.com/view/article/15229], accessed 25 May 2011.

¹⁷ One way that Scott's construction of Abbotsford as portraying his literary significance was articulated was through the silver urn given to Scott by Lord Byron in 1811. This 'Byron Urn', as it has become known, is now housed in a display cabinet in the drawing room. A number of significant points about this object may be noted. The historical circumstance of the initial donation of the gift by Byron to Scott was that of a very personal act representing mutual respect and understanding between the two writers. For Scott, the urn's significance was emblematic of him as one of the leading literary figures of the English language. This was symbolised by its prominent display with other literary objects in the Library during his lifetime such as a bust of Shakespeare which was placed in a prominent position in a niche on the east wall (to be later removed and placed in a stairwell); the Library along with the Study being the literary centres of the house. After Scott's

The interaction of these portrayals and their reception revolved around the ability to recognise how much of Scott, and what influenced him, can be experienced at Abbotsford. Some expected to be able to visit Scott's house unchanged since his death in 1832; for others the spaces and objects within the house enabled a different vision of Scott to be encountered. Nineteenth Century 'homes and haunts' visitors, such as Hawthorne and Fontane, visited Abbotsford with different expectations, both hoping to encounter something of Scott himself. Fontane wanted to find the literary genius in the house, but came away disappointed because he had to share his experience with others who were unable to appreciate Scott's spirit. Hawthorne also was unable to experience a sense of Scott as his expectations demanded a portrayal which was not in evidence, and left him feeling that Abbotsford was nothing more than a museum of curios.

The owners of Abbotsford have also attempted to enable visitors to experience the authentic Scott, from a guide who offered Hawthorne the opportunity to sit in Scott's chair to gain a physical connection with the writer's muse,¹⁸ through to the present day guided tours which highlight Scottish ancestry. The change in emphasis away from the literary to Scottish identity also supports this premise. Even though the evidence points to stagnation in interpretation from the 1850s, as witnessed by one visitor in 1905,¹⁹ visitors were still experiencing a sense of Scott, even though this spirit no longer surrounded his literary standing. When the significance of Scott changed, the family reacted by subtly adapting how Scott could be viewed at Abbotsford. However, the objectives of the Trust responsible for the management of the house since 2006, are, in part, financially driven and thereafter need to respond to diverse visitor expectations and interests. Today these expectations and interactions present both the literary and wider dimensions of Scott tailored to the motivations of different visitors. This is achieved through the guided tour which focuses on the literary significance of Scott and which is often taken up by visitors with a literary interest, or the self-directed tour which uses the guidebook and its emphasis on Scott's wider importance.

Newstead's long history has provided a number of conflicting narratives: the Byron House, the Byronic House, and the history of the non-Byron Newstead. To understand the tension prevalent in these narratives an in-depth study of how Newstead's long history has impacted on present day presentation at the house is required. Newstead's significance in the twenty-first century is enhanced by there being a recognisable element to the house in the form and features of the building which can be linked to the writer, and with Byron displays from the 1820s still being in the collection. However, these features and displays highlight the importance of Newstead having an unbroken narrative as a memorial to the writer, and in doing so emphasise the need to take cognisance of the history of the house and how this legacy of the writer has been interpreted and presented. A study of the history of the house shows that the 'Byron' features have been maintained and interpreted by all successive owners. Given this long history of representation of Byron at Newstead, what can be considered 'authentic' or 'original' at the house? In the case of Newstead its historical contexts are not fixed but have developed over the past two centuries, so the answer depends on whether Newstead is viewed as the 'Byron House' or 'Byronic House'.

A number of discussions surrounding authenticity and originality relate to the 'Byron House' - that is, when Byron lived there and the legacy of his literature with the house as subject, the spaces within the house he would have known, and the legacy of the Byron Relics left *in situ*. These all provide objects and spaces which lead to discussions surrounding the notion of a Byron 'aura' which may, or may not, be experienced at the site.

death the urn continued initially to be prominently displayed with other literary objects in the library where it had been during the writer's lifetime; Howitt's description of Abbotsford in 1847, fifteen years after the death of Scott, makes special note of this. However, later in the nineteenth century, the parts of Abbotsford central to the literary tradition of the house, that is the Library and the Study, were transformed completely into areas of public display and with this came a subtle yet significant shift in the presentation of the image of the house. In effect, the house was no longer as Scott had left it, as symbols and references to other figures were removed from these areas. The urn, with its Byron associations, was first moved, at some time after 1867, to a vault in a bank in Melrose and then, before 1954, to a sideboard in the Dining Room used by the Scott family. It was therefore taken away from public view and no longer represented Scott as a leading literary figure. Instead it became a private family heirloom, no longer for public consumption and too precious for public display. It was eventually, at some point prior to 2002, placed in a display cabinet in the Drawing Room for protection. The biography of the urn changed as its significance for Scott and the links to Byron were at first no longer the associations central to the owners' interpretation of Scott's Abbotsford, as they saw it, but eventually emphasis was placed upon it again.

¹⁸Hawthorne, *Stewart, R*, p.342.

¹⁹Crockett, *W Abbotsford – with illustrations by William Smith* (London: Adam and Charles Black, 1905), p.158.

This is something referred to by numerous visitors to Newstead in the past 200 years - again emphasising the need to study the history of the house - and by the present curator. The curator's perceptions of a Byron 'aura' at Newstead reflect her own detailed and thorough knowledge of the house and Byron, and also the experience of visitors ranging from Washington Irving in 1831 to Peter Porter in 1993, who could feel a 'sense' of Byron by just being in spaces that he occupied.²⁰ For example, Porter hoped that by walking in Byron's footsteps he would be able to experience what the writer had experienced. For others, tangible objects were required in order to touch the spirit of the writer; such as was the example of Irving and his wish to sleep in Byron's bed. The construction of narratives relating to Byron permeates the history of Newstead: even Thomas Wildman, who purchased the house from the writer in 1817, purposely exaggerated links to Byron that visitors could find. An example of this was the table on which Wildman suggested to visitors that Byron wrote the whole of *Childe Harold*, though it should be noted Byron wrote much of this poem after he left England in 1816.

According to the curator, the interpretation at Newstead allows an 'aura' of Byron to be formed; she believes that the Byron artefacts at Newstead retain an inherent 'aura' of the writer. This overlooks the need to interpret these objects so that visitors can recognise their Byronic connections. In other words, the Byron 'spirit' is not intrinsic, but has to be activated by catalysts that visitors can recognise and these are catalysts which have been put in place over the 200 year post-writer history of the house. This, in turn, is dependent upon visitors having the tools - knowledge, experience and expectations - to be able to respond. In reality, visitors come with a host of different 'tools' at a time when Byron's significance as a literary figure is not as great as in the nineteenth century. Hence the need to present Newstead as more than just a literary house today. There is also a financial element underpinning these changes in interpretation. An inclusive approach to interpretation has been driven by the need to attract a large audience in order to maximise its economic potential.

In offering the example of Keats House as a literary museum emphasis has centred on the motivations of the owners of the house. Keats House was not publicly associated with Keats immediately after he died. In addition, there is no evidence of widespread visits to the house as the main destination site of the writer before it was taken over and formally curated by an organisation. Although limited awareness of its significance remained, few people are recorded as going inside the house. Thus, when it was opened as a 'literary house', it did not have collections directly connected to Keats's brief time there. Research into Keats House shows that the site has witnessed changes in ownership, structural alterations and the dispersal of associated objects since it was occupied by Keats. Despite this, the various owners and visitors to the house, consider it to be important in understanding the life and works of Keats. Unlike Abbotsford and Newstead, where Scott and Byron's own descriptions of their associated houses are accessible, there is no evidence of Keats's emotional attachment to the site. In the twenty-first century Keats House is presented as being significant as the place of Keats's most important literary works and as a distinctive site for meaningful phases of his biography.

However, a greater significance for the findings of the research into Keats House is achieved when analysing it within the wider debates surrounding the establishment of authenticity and its impact on visitor motivation and expectation. A major focus of the interpretation of Keats at this location is based upon the perception of curators that an 'aura' of the writer can be experienced therein. In an attempt to establish a link to Keats, objects and spaces have been created at the house to provide an 'authentic' interpretation in order to evoke and reproduce events in the life of Keats. These spaces and objects have undergone a number of changes, due to different owners, and different themes have been given greater or lesser emphasis at different stages of the house's history. An understanding of this history is therefore required. Examples can be seen with the conscious effort to reproduce the external look of the building as it was in Keats's time. This created a situation enabling visitors to experience an environment of a similar nature to that Keats experienced when writing *Ode to a Nightingale*. This continues inside the house where, for example, the sitting room has been filled with objects to replicate an event in Keats's life so that visitors may encounter his 'spirit'. In addition, from the 1970s Camden Council²¹ included a number of replicas and reproductions, such as Keats's 'tent-bed', to achieve a closer link to the writer. Keats House shows signs of being turned into a monument manipulated to physically express particular narratives. This was carried out at a time completely divorced from any direct association between the writer and the house.

²⁰Irving, Peter Porter, 'Lord Byron, Newstead Abbey, Linby, Nottinghamshire', in Marsh, K, pp.83-94.

²¹ Local government organisation responsible for Keats House 1965-1997

Keats House shows the interpretation and appropriations of the later generations who continued and perpetuated its existence. At the house, although the owners hoped to create an 'aura' of Keats based on episodes from his life; it is the audience which ultimately creates the 'aura'. This is an aura which is derived from two centuries of biographical publication and image-making. The continuing importance of ensuring healthy visitor numbers has meant that meeting visitor expectations has been a central objective for its interpretation.

Conclusion

In conclusion, my research has found that each of the three houses is different in terms of its meaning to the writer, its intrinsic merit beyond the writer, its subsequent ownership and presentation history. Nevertheless, key similarities between them can be determined: the post-writer history still impacts today, visitor expectations over time have shaped current presentation, and visitors seek 'aura', whether or not there are physical remains associated with the writer. However, this aura is dependent on whether the houses in the twenty-first century can 'speak' to their audiences. As the works of these writers are read less and less then the owners have had to adapt their language to one which is within the visitors' experience. It is this which drives interpretation in the twenty-first century and not any direct portal to the writers themselves and, therefore, it is in the post-writer histories where we find the basis of the interpretations.

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