



The touring reader: Understanding the bibliophile's experience of literary tourism

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HIGHLIGHTS

- Offers a close examination of the literary enthusiast as tourist.
- Explores beyond the accepted figure of the literary pilgrim.
- Employs literary theory to explore touristic experience.
- Provides the first use of the concept of concretisation within the context of tourist studies.
- Highlights the close relationship between reading and touring.

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ABSTRACT

This research explores the literary enthusiast's experience of planning and undertaking literary inspired trips. The research reconceptualises the dominant figure of the literary pilgrim, inspired to visit sites associated with favourite authors, by using detailed results from 30 open-ended surveys distributed to delegates at a literary conference. The findings indicate that these keen readers prefer to plan their own trips and shun organised attractions and mainstream tourist information in favour of employing the texts themselves as source material. Respondents then feed back their experiences into the re-reading of the literary text. These findings are analysed using the concept of concretisation borrowed from literary theory. This concept, which has not been used in previous tourist studies, reflects the experience of these visitors who are using travel to solidify their reading of favourite books. This research therefore highlights the interdependence of texts and travels and emphasises the important role that imagination plays in the experience and recollection of tourist trips.

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1. Introduction

To travel under the influence of a favourite author, book or poem is an impulse dating back to the rise of the popular novel in the 18th century. This activity continues to expand and many regions and sites exploit their literary connections, encouraging visitors to seek out places linked to authors' lives and their imaginative outpourings. We have also seen a similar interest in book towns, literary trails and festivals (MacLeod 2009; MacLeod, Hayes, & Slater, 2009; Robertson & Yeoman, 2014; Saretzki, 2013).

Visit England has declared 2017 to be Year of Literary Heroes (Fig. 1), reporting that one in four Britons visited an English literary location in 2016 (VisitEngland, 2017). This flowering goes hand in hand with a strong demand for books and e-books, particularly in the top markets of USA, China and UK (IPA, 2016), and the continuing popularity of book groups and online literary discussion fora (Burger, 2015). This reflects the enduring appeal of the written word and underpins the ongoing desire to travel to expand this interest. Although this form of touring has a long history, academic research on literary tourism seems to have proliferated only since 1990 (Hoppen, Brown, & Fyall, 2014; O'Connor & Kim, 2014) and has largely been concerned with case studies of specific literary tourism destinations (Busby, Brunt, & Lund, 2003; Herbert, 1996; Müller, 2006) and the tourism development potential of literary themes (Butler, 1986; Smith, 2012;

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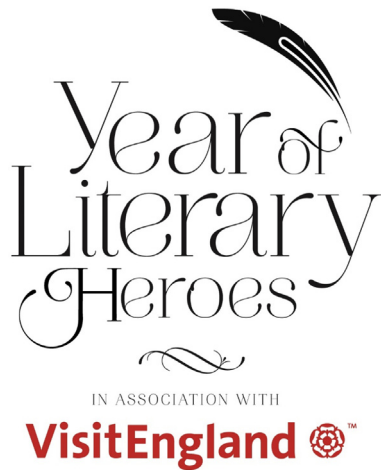


Fig. 1. VisitEngland, 2017 Year of Literary Heroes.
Source: VisitBritain/VisitEngland. 2017.

Yiannakis & Davies, 2012). Less emphasis seems to have been placed on the literary tourists themselves (Brown, 2015; Es & Reijnders, 2016) although several studies on defining the literary tourist as pilgrim have been undertaken (Brown, 2015; Busby & Shetliffe, 2013; Herbert, 2001; Pocock, 1992). These studies tend to explore the literary pilgrim *in situ* and differentiate them from the more generalist visitor in terms of their knowledge of the author and their works and the purposefulness of their visit. They reveal a spectrum of literary interest ranging from those simply visiting a site whilst on a general tour to those who are devotees of a specific author or work and are purposefully seeking out associated settings.

This research seeks to contribute to these existing studies by focussing on the experiences, not of the pilgrim at the literary site, but of the *reader* as tourist. This study was prompted by the researchers' own (often shared) experiences of searching out specific sites associated with favourite texts and the realisation that much of the enjoyment is gained from self-discovery rather than visiting a demarcated site (Hoppen et al., 2014). Consequently, although the literary pilgrim seeking to commune with a favourite author at key biographical sites is a ubiquitous and long-standing figure in the field of literary tourism studies, the researchers were keen to discover if all enthusiastic readers could be thus defined or whether there are literary-inspired visitors who travel to enhance their experience of literature and do so without necessarily engaging with the sites and markers produced by the tourism industry. The aim of the research is therefore firstly, to research literary enthusiasts as tourists to ascertain their trip planning habits; secondly to evaluate the centrality of the literary text itself in relation to their travels; and thirdly, to determine what avid readers experience when on the literary trail. To this end, the literary pilgrim is reconceptualised within a co-construction paradigm, using a literary theory approach not found in tourist studies. In order to explore this theme, a cohort of self-confessed book lovers at a literary conference was used as the sample group for the research.

2. Literature review

This section reviews studies of the evolution of literary tourism with emphasis on the figure of the literary pilgrim. Various research approaches to the experience of the literary tourist are subsequently analysed.

2.1. Evolution of literary tourism

Literary tourism is defined as travel inspired by an association with authors or their literary works and studies in the field agree that these links can range from the autobiographical to the imaginative and often via the socially constructed as visitors seek out authorial birthplaces and burial sites alongside literary settings and purpose-built attractions conveying a literary theme (Fawcett & Cormack, 2001; Herbert, 2001; Tetley & Bramwell, 2002). Literary sites are therefore diverse with Gentile and Brown (2015) offering eight different typologies of literary-inspired sites including writers' homes, graves, bookshop tourism and literary festivals. UNESCO includes literature as part of its cultural landscape designation (Ruiz Scarfuto, 2013) and has now identified specific *Cities of Literature* with destinations such as Edinburgh and Melbourne recently winning this accolade (Hamilton & Seale, 2014). The range of literary-themed destinations increases with the popularity of film and television adaptations of literary works encouraging more visitation, both actual and virtual (Gibson, 2006; Pennacchia, 2015; Troost, 2006). Literary tourism can in fact be considered as the forerunner of film and media-based tourism and in many cases the connections between these forms of tourism are very strong as O'Connor and Kim (2014) suggest. Mediatized literary locations reach out to wider film audiences and can also enrich the experiences of the literary tourist. Thus, contemporary Beatrix Potter fans can visit the Lake District in Cumbria, UK and see the farm where she lived and produced her children's books, experience the commercially-owned *World of Beatrix Potter* attraction and soak up the landscapes portrayed in the 2006 film biography, *Miss Potter*. Similarly, fans of novelist Charles Dickens can pay their respects at several former residences across London and Kent, absorb the atmosphere of a Dickensian London on a walking tour of the narrow alleyways of the City before (until recently) taking part in the theme-park experience of *Dickens' World* in Chatham, UK.

Historically, tourism and literature have long enjoyed a close alignment and literary-inspired visits are associated with some of the earliest forms of travel and especially with the Grand Tour (Buzard, 1993; Hendrix, 2009; Ousby, 1990; Towner, 2002). A key event in the early years of organised literary tourism was David Garrick's Stratford Jubilee in 1769 (Santesso, 2004; Watson, 2006) although Santesso notes that traveller's interest in the birthplace of John Milton predates that famous celebration of William Shakespeare. Tourists were already stealing souvenir cuttings from Wordsworth's cottage garden in the Lakes by 1820 (Donaldson, Gregory, & Murrieta-Flores, 2015); a pocket travel version of Walter Scott's *The Lady of the Lake* had been produced for tourists' use by 1825 (Watson, 2006); and *Burns Country* had already been established in Ayrshire, Scotland by the early 19th century (MacKay & Pittock, 2011), demonstrating that visiting a place with literary associates has long been a key motivation to travel within Britain. Further afield, Samuel Butler's utopian novel *Erewhon* was published in 1872 and within weeks, tourists were arriving at his Upper Rangita Valley home in New Zealand (Buchmann, 2006); similarly, L.M Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* drew visitors to Canada's Prince Edward Island (the setting and authorial home) soon after its 1908 publication (Fawcett & Cormack, 2001). Although historically a European or Anglophone activity (Yiannakis & Davies, 2012), organised literary tourism is now found throughout the world - the first writer's home in China for example (Lu Xun, the nation's most celebrated modern writer), having been open in Shanghai since 1951 (Wang & Zhang, 2017).

Literature also played a key role in prefiguring tourism in some locales, for example the Scottish Highlands as a romantic tourist

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