

Secular Relics: Narrative Objects and Material Biography in the Museums of Darwin, Elgar and Holmes

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Abstract

This thesis investigates objects considered to be significant through their association with historically noteworthy persons and how these objects are displayed. Such objects and their related cultural practices are regularly compared to sacred relics. However, this has not been tested in the existing literature on the subject. If these objects and their display are analogous to relic practice how can this be explained in the modern museum? If this analogy holds then the presence of the biographical object in modern museum display is anomalous. Are they simply anachronisms, or can they be understood in terms of the period from which their modern display emerged? These objects and their display are indicative of a particular relationship to material culture and to the figures with which they are associated, that has persisted into the twenty-first century.

This thesis considers these objects and their display as a cultural practice. It establishes their historical context and interrogates the relic analogy. It focuses on the objects and museums of a scientist (Charles Darwin), a composer (Edward Elgar) and a fictional detective (Sherlock Holmes) rather than the literary subjects which dominate existing literature. The narrative objects in these museums tell stories of their association with their subject through their display, in doing so they become a material form of biography. The particularities of objects, subject, display and location observed in these biographical museums provides the material through which to question the whole phenomenon.

This thesis argues that the construction and communication of these objects' association with their subject, by their museums, can encourage the perception of their relic-like connection with a particular past. The museum visually narrates and authenticates its objects, apparently preserving the traces of their subject's life. In turn, this simulates the subject's presence encouraging empathetic engagement with the subject and their objects. This enables the objects in the biographical museum to be viewed as both relic-like and as products of modernity.

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Introduction

Charles Babbage's brain; Virginia Woolf's cheque; Queen Victoria's stocking; Lord Kitchener's Glove; Michael Faraday's spark apparatus; a pillow from Freud's couch; Charles Dickens's quill; Mrs Simpson's skates; a scrap of Charles Lindbergh's plane: these disparate objects were amongst those exhibited in a gallery exhibition of 1995 called "The Maybe" by the artist Cornelia Parker. Some of them were shown alone, others in small groups in glass cases within the Serpentine gallery in London. As part of the same exhibition, she projected or framed macro-photographs of similar kinds of objects such as a record that belonged to Hitler, a chalk mark made by Albert Einstein, feathers from Freud's couch, a spider that died at Mark Twain's house, and a feather from Benjamin Franklin's attic. The artist brought them together from many separate museum collections, all of which had associations with particular celebrated historical characters.

What was it about these objects that made them more significant than any other cheque, glove or pillow? In addition to that basic question, Parker's own thoughts about "The Maybe" prompted three ideas from which this current research emerged. First, and primarily, Parker called the objects she was working with "relics" and its collection a "reliquary". Can one call Virginia Woolf's cheque or Babbage's brain relics? As shall become clear, this analogous relation, between objects associated with holy figures and those associated with historical or celebrated figures, initially seems appropriate. However, without further consideration, it is difficult to see whether this analogy is over simplistic or if it has some substance. The use of the word relic and its reliquary recurs in much writing about this type of secular object but is rarely examined closely.¹

Secondly, Parker described her role in this work as being to "isolate the objects", and use their history as a "sculptural material"; creating new narratives or "little histories" (Parker, 1996, p. 56).² This description is intriguing, do objects carry their histories with them in such a way that the influence of curation can impact upon those histories? All that has occurred to, or around, the object can later be drawn out through creative display (sculpting material histories). In this type of object, it is particular histories which can be drawn out.

Thirdly, there was also a question of authenticity or the truth of the object being displayed. For Parker, the ambiguity of the objects' 'truth' brought the objects further into the realm of the

¹ Writers who use the terms relic/reliquary/pilgrim/shrine in this way include (Albano, 2007; Arkin, 1981; Fara, 2000; Goldhill, 2011; Malcolmson, 2012; McDiarmid, 2002; Otto and Pedersen, 1998; Parker, 1996; Pretzer, 2004; Trubek, 2011; Young, 2015)

² She describes how in previous works she had imposed histories upon objects by working with them, whereas in these works other persons had impressed their histories. (Parker, 1996, p. 56)

relic (ICA, 2000, p. 52). She had to rely upon the object's lender for an assertion of its authenticity, which in turn she asserted, adding her own truths through curation. The impression given in the exhibition catalogue was that a sense of authenticity relied upon the authority of the artist/curator to narrate, articulate and even validate the object being displayed. I was left wondering what is more important: the authenticity of the objects, or the narrative which underlies its display. The question then became whether similar questions of relic analogy, material histories 'sculpted' to form new narratives and curator influence on authentication would arise when the objects were outside the artist constructed space and within their more usual context? It is the objects in their more usual context that provide the source material for this research.

For this kind of associated object, there are questions of definition, meaning (or significance) and context. In part, this research is an attempt to define these objects and their possible meanings for the viewers and institutions. Yet, as it progressed, the more pressing and overarching question became: how can the existence of these objects and their display in modern museum collections be explained? My initial assumption had been that they might be secular relics, and the use of words like relic and reliquary by Parker, and other writers, encouraged this assumption. However, the analogy requires more questioning than it had thus far been given. In addition, if these objects are relic-like in the way they are displayed and in the disposition that audiences bring to them, then are they simply anachronisms, remnants not only of the material past but of older dispositions toward objects?

Such questions are important because in the context of an essentially secular modern society these relic-like objects and their associated cultural practices are anomalous. More than that, the display of these objects in biographically associated collections, is not just persisting but escalating; raising broader questions about our culture's relationship with objects and the historical figures with which they are associated. The display of these relic-like objects provides insight into the way we understand displayed objects and the possibilities offered by this form of representation.

Much of the writing about these kinds of museum objects and their display comes from the field of literary studies (discussed further later in this introduction). Such writing focuses on the possessions of eighteenth and nineteenth-century writers such as Dickens and Wordsworth, but the majority of this writing concentrates specifically upon their houses and associated sites. However, I have undertaken a more interdisciplinary approach drawing on the interconnected fields of museum studies, material culture studies, media and cultural studies. This includes accounts of modernity which provide a means to question their presence in modern museum display. It became clear that in addition to the comparison with relic practice it was necessary to examine the influence of other cultural frameworks on object interpretation because only when considered in their contemporary context can these objects and their continuing cultural significance be understood.

From the outset, it was necessary to define the terms that I would be using: secular relics, narrative objects, associative objects, biographical objects. One cannot call any of these relics until the term relic has been analysed and other options have been considered. To this end, what follows is a brief history of these kinds of objects, which were kept and displayed for their close connection to absent others deemed important to the keepers (whether individual or group). Although relic is the word most frequently used, there may have been other terms that equally could be applied. These categories of objects include curiosities, Romantic literary collections and later nineteenth-century ways of describing such objects. It then continues with a description of the antecedents to the modern displays and museums that house relic-like objects.

Firstly, and most importantly the relic: what was (is) a relic? In her introduction to the *Past and Present* supplement *Relics and Remains*, Alexandra Walsham defines the relic as “at the most basic level...a material object that relates to a particular individual and/or to events and places with which that individual is associated” (Walsham, 2010, p. 11). More specifically, relics were created through association with a holy or sacred individual, saints and martyrs. Relics have been known in the Western Christian tradition from as early as the second century, reaching their greatest number in Medieval Europe (usually described as 500-1500_{AD}) (Sumption, 1975, p. 22). Objects made sacred by contact or association with a sacred figure also exist in the Islamic and Buddhist traditions.

Relics are usually fragments. They came from a variety of sources, with different forms of connection to the sacred figure. They include the bones, body parts and hair of saints carefully retained after death: for example, St George’s arm, St Peter’s rib, the tooth of Mary Magdalene or the blood of Christ. These relics are defined as bodily or corporeal relics: the connection between the saint and the object is direct, the objects are literally part of the sacred person, and therefore sacred themselves. Relics could also be objects which had been in intimate contact with such religious figures. These are called contact or non-corporeal relics and could include fragments of clothing, objects used by the sacred figure during life or associated with their death. This would also include relics associated with the crucifixion: wood from the True Cross, Christ’s shroud, and the crown of thorns. However, these are far more significant than relics merely associated with the saints. In Notre Dame in Paris, the cathedral holds, and still regularly uses, a relic said to be the crown of thorns worn by Christ (*Treasures of Heaven*, 2011). Such objects were made sacred by contiguity.

There were also relics created as a result of having touched other relics or sacred sites. Known as *brandea*, these were objects such as pieces of paper or cloth wiped in the dust surrounding the saint’s tomb or dipped in the oil from the tomb’s lamps as well as, in some cases, pieces of the tombs themselves (Geary, 1988, p. 174; Sumption, 1975, p. 24). These objects were sacred through association. As reliquary practices became more established later in the medieval period, these three types of relic were developed into a hierarchy and later into an official Roman Catholic classification system. The closer the connection, the

greater the power that the relic was seen to have; power to perform miracles and consecrate churches. It was as though there was transferral of saintly attributes through physical proximity. Whilst bodily fragments were part of the sacred figure and therefore most important, the significance of contiguity is inherently part of relic practice.

The purpose of the relic was to provide the worshipper with an important connection to the sacred figure. This was perceived to be possible because the relic was not just a representation or “indicator of divine presence but a physical embodiment of it, each particle encapsulating the essence of the departed person...in its entirety” (Walsham, 2010, p. 12). This meant that a single fragment of bone stood for the complete form of the individual. The relic held the power of the whole in its fragmentary centre. The reason that the corporeal relic was considered to be more significant than the non-corporeal may well have centred on this perception of physical embodiment: the bodily fragment more clearly embodying than the contact relic. The ability of the bodily fragment to embody its absent whole is possible through a sort of synecdochic thinking. Synecdoche is a type of metaphor that substitutes a part for its whole. In this instance, the toe or finger bone refers to the whole saint. It was this synecdochic process that allowed even the most fragmentary of objects to retain the significance of the whole.

The process through which contact or non-corporeal relics gained their significance was based upon contiguous association. The Saint's touch or close association with the object transformed it into a carrier of an essence of the saint. Rather than the synecdochic relation of the corporeal relic, these relics stood in a metonymic relation to the sacred signifier. The metonym is a type of metaphor where one thing is used as a substitute for something else with which it is closely or contiguously associated. The contact relic was a surrogate for the saint. Association by contiguity, the signifying touch of the saint, enabled even the minutest of objects to be immensely powerful. So much so that even the metonymic contact relic could transform objects it touched, and did not lose its power through fragmentation. A relic like the Crown of Thorns, with its supremely important association with Christ, is essentially a contact relic. Yet thorns were broken from it and put in other reliquaries without the crown losing significance or those broken off thorns diminishing in value. The contact relic stood in metonymic relation to the saint, but could also stand in synecdochic relation to itself. Each relic was created through a complex series of relations.

Contiguous association and metonymic connection, create both the contact relic and the biographical object. The quill, couch or table that were associated with figures like Dickens, Freud or Austen bear the same metonymic relation between object and subject as the cloak, stave or sandals of the saint. Dickens' quill is related to him through contiguity, and through this process stands in for him and his writings. Contiguous association accounts for many of the objects that have come to stand for famous figures and are examined in this research.

Contiguous or metonymic relations also transformed the location of the relic. Relics and reliquaries were used to consecrate churches. Gradually the relic became the main means of

consecrating churches. The more numerous, or more powerful, the relics that churches housed, the more power the church was considered to have. The relic's significance was believed to permeate the building in which it was housed. The church in return gave the relic validity. Therefore, consecration was a two-way process. Their importance to this consecration process meant that the object's authenticity became a concern. However, the ways in which the relic's authenticity was assured bears little relation to modern notions of authentication. The verification of the relic as authentic was more of an assertion of belief rather than a scientific examination, although many relics did have *authenticae* or documentation to 'officially' back their claim to legitimacy (Geary, 1988, p. 77). The relic's authenticity was tested through stories of miraculous events that had been prompted by it or through priests' or monks' visions of its sanctity. In some cases, the relics were tested with a trial by fire, survival being proof of their authenticity (Sumption, 1975, p. 40). This would seem to be an extension of the belief in the incorruptibility of sacred bodies, their resistance to decay being one step closer to beatification (Warner, 2006, p. 2). The authenticity of the relic relied on the story woven around it, the authority created by its surroundings (reliquary and church), but also by the churchmen who were its guardians.

Relics were not shown in isolation and had a very specific form of display. In nearly all cases, the relic was hidden from view and contained within a reliquary. Reliquaries were elaborate and highly decorated display cases. Reliquaries appeared in all sizes, from intimate personal reliquaries to substantial shrine-like structures in churches. The decoration of reliquaries developed over the centuries, becoming by the twelfth century elaborate and expensively decorated sculptural forms. Such elaborately decorated cases were a means of portraying the relic's importance or value as well as a way of telling the story of the saint to the viewer. This kind of display was an integral part of relic practice, a clear means to communicate the connection of these fragments to the saint, and therefore their meaning.

The display of relics encouraged religious devotion and an experience of the divine. The audience for these sacred fragments was the pilgrim. Their function for the pilgrim was as a medium through which to connect with the divine because the object provided a concentrated locus for the absent saint. The atmosphere created in medieval pilgrimage churches encouraged the belief that the saint was present. Arnold Angenendt considers this as having begun far back in the history of religion with the belief that the corpse retained a second soul after death and, therefore, the dead were able to reanimate themselves through their bones (Angenendt, 2011, p. 19). In early Christianity, the earthly body continued to be connected to the soul in heaven which would enable its renewal at the Resurrection: "a miraculous double existence" (Angenendt, 2011, p. 20). The relic acted as a medium through which the faithful could connect with the religious figure in order to request the saint to intercede on their behalf (Geary, 1988, p. 175). This function was enough to encourage the pilgrim to travel great distances in order to be in the presence of such relics. The journey to the pilgrimage site, and the rituals on arrival, were part of the experience sought by the pilgrim. Pilgrimage routes

could also mimic the actions of the saint's life, allowing the pilgrim to walk in the saint's footsteps in a ritual of veneration.

The importance of these objects to the life of the church meant that the relic became a vehicle of not only a sacred but also an earthlier power; they had commercial value as well as sacred value. Pilgrimage brought income into the church. Once money entered the equation, the system was more prone to corruption through commerce and fakery. The trade in relics perhaps inevitably led to unscrupulous figures trying to profit from the belief of others, frequently dealing in fakes or stealing relics from churches. This was one of the reasons for the decline in relic practice which almost certainly began with the Reformation. For Protestants the relic and its trade represented church corruption and were counter to their beliefs, being a form of idolatry. In England, relics and reliquaries were destroyed during the dissolution of the monasteries, for example, Thomas Beckett's at Canterbury. Elaborate reliquaries were emptied of their holy cargo and fell into the hands of wealthy collectors of art or curiosities, including the great collectors the John Tradescants, discussed later. Alexandra Walsham argues that the Reformation redefined the relic as a "symbolic memento rather than as a miraculous divine entity" (Walsham, 2010, p. 22). The relic and the reliquary lost something of its power in northern European churches although relics are still being created and reliquaries built to house them in some Roman Catholic countries.

Non-religious figures have also been the focus of relic display over the centuries. These have included what historian Jonathan Sumption calls "political saints" such as Edward II and III and Henry VI in the fourteenth century (Sumption, 1975). However, because kings were considered to be chosen by God, their relics would certainly have retained a semi-religious status, at least during the medieval period.³ The retention of royal objects continued into the sixteenth century with the collection of the objects of Henry VIII, Elizabeth I⁴ and Charles I's vest⁵ in the seventeenth century. It is not clear whether these objects held onto their semi-religious status. However, by the sixteenth century these former possessions were probably not retained in the same way as relics. These do not seem to be like the fragments of the medieval relic church, held from view in ornate reliquaries, and yet the importance of contiguous association remains integral to their collection and display. Collectors such as John Tradescant (seventeenth century) and Ebenezer Mussel (eighteenth century) kept objects that once belonged to royalty such as Edward the Confessor's glove, Henry VIII's glove or Charles I's hat button as part of their larger collections. Such collections included rare books, natural objects from exotic destinations or histories and manmade objects which might dazzle through their beauty or puzzle by their manufacture. In these collections, the objects shared their display with other disparate objects and the impulse to possess them was not the

³ This is evident in the common medieval belief in the royal touch to miraculously cure the king's evil (Scrofula). <http://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/broughttolife/techniques/kingsevil>

⁴ Ashmolean Museum Oxford

⁵ Museum of London

same as the medieval church.

In this sort of collection of objects, the relic-type object became a curiosity. Objects were collected together according to their affinities with other objects. Famously the preserve of the aristocracy and the wealthy, curiosity collections (*wunderkammer* or *kunstkammer*) were also a means of collecting the world through its objects. These could be great accumulations in either specially designed cabinets or, in the case of royal curiosity collections, whole rooms. Although these were private collections, they were intended to be on show to a select audience. John Tradescant senior and junior had travelled in their capacity as plant collectors and the content of their collection reflected the world they had seen in its objects: the world in a box. The curiosity was a rarity, a unique thing contained within a collection of other unique things. Patrick Mauries describes curiosities as liminal objects that defied classification (Mauries, 2002, p. 12).

In cabinets of curiosities..., the presence of any particular object was justified, a priori, by its rarity. It was a rarity that might be purely contingent (when the item in question was one of the last surviving parts of a series, for instance); or it might concern its origins, whether in time (as with relics) or in space (as with ethnographic objects); or it might derive from its exceptional workmanship (as with pieces of finely worked gold, turned ivory and the like). (Mauries, 2002, p. 73)

Arrangements of the objects were designed to “establish or emphasise the affinities that existed between things” (Mauries, 2002, p. 34). These affinities lay in the eye of the beholder, guided by particular philosophical senses of the order of the world. The objects were often collected for the stories they could tell or, rather, for the stories their collector could tell through them. A glove is merely a glove until its former owner is revealed. The connection to its former possessor is still important but signifies rarity or uniqueness rather than religious power. This is what connected them with the other displayed natural and crafted objects.

Curiosity collecting in this form declined during the Enlightenment, developing in certain instances into either more systematic private science collections or, as in the case of the Tradescant objects, being integrated into a larger collection, the Ashmolean Museum, Oxford. New classificatory systems superseded these displays, and they came to be viewed as too eclectic. These new systems separated the natural objects from the manmade artefacts with which they had shared a display. This shift is described in more detail in Chapter One alongside a fuller consideration of curiosity displays.

During the eighteenth century, the display of biographical objects became part of popular entertainments. Both Madame Tussaud and her mentor Curtius made a common practice of displaying ‘biographical’ objects with their waxworks which were felt to authenticate the waxworks and entice the audience (Berridge, 2007): for example, Marat’s bath shown with a waxwork of Marat lying in it (Berridge, 2007, p. 147). Napoleon’s coach and personal effects including shirt, cloak, waistcoat, and handkerchief were first shown at Bullock’s Egyptian Hall (built 1812) in London and then bought by Tussaud for her Baker Street museum (1835) (Berridge, 2007, p. 279). This practice was also used by other waxwork exhibitors later in the

century, like those in Sweden, who went further with their “obsessive fascination with contiguity” (Sandberg, 2003, p. 60). If the ‘authentic’ clothes of the subject could not be found then curators would source clothing for the waxwork figures from the subject’s tailor (even from the same piece of cloth) to achieve some level of authentic connection (Sandberg, 2003, p. 60).

The private collection of this type of object continued through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries but not in the mixed collections of the earlier curiosity cabinets. These late collectors were looking to specialise in particular categories of objects and not to display their objects in ornate cabinets. The relic-like association or contiguous object did not easily fit into the new categories of the public museums but continued to provide a subject for the private collector, who could specialise in one particular individual’s objects, for example, a military collector focusing on Nelson or Napoleon or a literary collector on Shelley or Wordsworth. The former possessions of figures like Shelley were sought after. These Romantic ‘relics’ included body parts, possessions and *brandea* in the form of leaves snatched from trees that surrounded homes and even grave sites: for example, Wordsworth’s home, or Napoleon’s grave (Pascoe, 2006, p. 3).

In her book, *The Hummingbird Cabinet* (2006), Judith Pascoe begins her examination of Romantic collections with the collector Edward Silsbee (1826-1900), who pursued Shelley’s objects. Pascoe suggests that the Romantics were a prime target for these collectors and were peculiarly susceptible to having “their hearts dried to a powder in a desk drawer or enshrined apart from their bodies” (Pascoe, 2006, p. 3). This was partly because they were subject to a new kind of literary tourism (discussed later in this introduction). Pascoe makes a comparison with Henry James’ novella *the Aspern Papers* (1888) which satirises a collector’s pursuit of his target poet’s objects and the provenance a particular source gives him; the provenance of the object, or the traceable path of different owners that leads definitely back to the source: the writer or poet. The narrative of the object’s life since contact was as integral to the objects significance for these collectors as it had been of the relic. The connection the collector could have to the poet was founded upon this narrative.

Both the Tussaud exhibits and the Romantic collections originate in the same burgeoning interest in the lives of the celebrated and with biographies. In this, perhaps, the objects under discussion might be described as biographical in nature, enabling the term for them to be biographical objects and biographical display. Biographer Hermione Lee describes biography as “the story of a person told by someone else... [as] a form of narrative, not just a presentation of facts” (Lee, 2009, p. 5). One might describe it then as the story of an individual life to be read/viewed by society.

The practices and perspectives of biography have changed over the centuries from hagiography to the stories of exemplary lives, to the ‘warts and all’ biography. The former were concerned with great deeds and the public lives of their subjects and the latter with revealing something of the private subject. By the nineteenth century, there were calls for biography to

be a “mixture of sympathetic emotion, impartiality, and moral illustration and for censoring of particulars which do not reflect great honour on the deceased” (Lee, 2009, p. 55). However, gradually over the nineteenth century, biographical narrative became more focussed on private life. The boundary between public and private shifted: Lee calls it a shaky dividing line (Lee, 2009, p. 68). Victorian biographies were often written by descendants or disciples who could piously memorialize, write sympathetically and affectionately, with veneration censoring as they went (Lee, 2009, p. 58). During the nineteenth century, there was a sharp rise in the number of biographies and autobiographies, and this continued into the twentieth century where biographies began to be influenced by ideas derived from psychoanalysis (Gay, 1998, p. 8), encouraging authors to seek insights into the inner lives of their subjects. Whichever type of biography, the biographer uses documentation and testimonies to formulate their texts. The objects of this study might be described as biographical objects insofar as they are equivalent to those documents and testimonies. Perhaps objects could be described as forms of material biography?

Biographical Object and Modernity

As I have suggested, objects that have been associated with revered/admired people have been collected and displayed for centuries. They have been called relics and curiosities. However, in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to use these terms would have seemed anachronistic. By the seventeenth century, the reformation had all but eradicated relic practice, especially in Northern Europe, and curiosity collecting had been superseded by a science of collecting and substantial institutional collections in public museums. Where does this leave the objects in Silsbee’s collection, in Tussaud’s displays, or indeed those associated objects that had been in curiosity collections and had been dispersed? During the nineteenth century, the notion of a relic-like object of a non-religious figure becomes more problematic, especially in those countries which had long separated from the Catholic Church. Are these echoes or shadows of relic-hood or might they be defined in terms more appropriate to the nineteenth century? One way of considering such a question is through the notion of the aura, as it is understood in the work of Walter Benjamin, the German philosopher and cultural critic. Benjamin’s concept of aura surfaced repeatedly in his writing life (1913 – 1940) and his ideas about it shift several times in his works. Recognising that it is a shifting concept, this text will not try to reach a definitive definition of aura, but will consider how the concept might help elucidate the status of the objects under consideration here.

Benjamin describes the aura as “a strange weave of space and time: the unique appearance or semblance of distance, no matter how close it may be” (Benjamin, 1999c, p. 518).⁶ The concept of aura combines the rarity value of the unique object with its relic-like

⁶ He all but repeats this same phrase in “Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility” (Benjamin, 2002b, p. 104)

quality. It is as though, despite objects like Dickens' quill or Victoria's stocking being right in front of the viewer, they maintain an aloof or an unattainable quality and one not just based on a glass cabinet. It is as if the object's past, its origins, are visible through the object and this past drawn into the present is the apparition of distance. This sense of aura encapsulates the object's potential uniqueness and authenticity.

This aspect of aura appears most clearly in "The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility" (Benjamin, 2002b). In this the aura is an aesthetic category, a quality present in traditional art, which was associated with the singular status of the artwork; its authority, authenticity and unattainability. Benjamin gives the example of a statue of Venus which to the Greeks was an object of worship but to medieval clerics was a "sinister idol", a transition that echoes the later movement of ornate reliquaries into the museums, although this was a translation from ritual object to art object. Despite an artwork's transmission through time, the work maintains its aura of uniqueness and authenticity. However, for Benjamin, the aura in this sense in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries has begun to break down through reproduction techniques such as photography and film. The reproduction lacks a unique existence, a past-ness, history that is transmitted into the present and supplies its aura. In the context of this essay, this is, for him, not a bad change as it releases the artwork from ritual.

In a later essay, he takes the notion of the aura in a slightly different direction by making it seem to be not only an echo of the past but a responsive one. In the essay "On some Motifs in Baudelaire", he examines the poet's works but it is also an extended discussion of memory and the decline of aura. The aura in this instance is formed by a moment where the past appears woven into the present and, in that instant, the auratic object gives the appearance of returning our gaze.

Experience of the aura thus rests on the transposition of a response common in human relationship to the relationship between the inanimate or natural object and man. The person we look at, or who feels he is being looked at, looks at us in turn. To perceive the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return. (Benjamin, 1999d, p. 184)

This impression of a returned gaze might not have seemed unusual to a medieval pilgrim because the relic was the saint and therefore could see the pilgrim. For the modern viewer, this experience of the aura is concerned with the perception of some active property of the autonomous object; something communicable to the viewer across spatial or temporal distance. This sense of distance sets the aura up in opposition to his notion of the trace, another concept that may help to formulate a definition for the objects of my research.

Trace and aura. The trace is the appearance of a nearness, however far removed the thing that left it behind may be. The aura is the appearance of a distance, however close the thing that calls it forth. In the trace, we gain possession of the thing; in the aura, it takes possession of us (Benjamin, 2002a, p. 447)

The trace might be called the visible (and sometimes invisible) signs (indexes) of the past and this appears to be integral to the auratic objects of this study. Yet, as with his notion of aura,

Benjamin's idea of trace changes across his writings. At times aura and trace seem closely connected and interchangeable depending on circumstances.

The trace too is associated with authenticity. Repeatedly in his writings, Benjamin draws on the trace as a sign of some quintessential sense of origin or uniqueness. The trace is the sign of history, of an object's past; it is also a sign of its maker, or at least the hands that the object has passed through. As with the aura, the reproduction troubles the notion of the trace:

In even the most perfect reproduction, one thing is lacking: the here and now of the work of art – its unique existence in a particular place. It is this unique existence – and nothing else – that bears the mark of the history to which the work had been subject. This history includes changes to the physical structure of the work over time, together with any changes in ownership...The here and now of the original underlies the concept of its authenticity, and on the latter in turn is founded the idea of a tradition which has passed the object down as the same, identical thing to the present day...The authenticity of the thing is the quintessence of all that is transmissible in it from its origin on, ranging from its physical duration to the historical testimony relating to it. (Benjamin, 2002b, p. 103)

I will return to Benjamin's notion of the trace in order to understand the objects of this research: their uniqueness and their quality of being laden with particular pasts.

Benjamin's ideas about a decline in the aura are bound into wider arguments which emerged towards the end of the nineteenth century, and cannot be overlooked in examining objects which could be called secular relics. This was an idea that society had lost something during the increasing industrialisation and rationalisation of the nineteenth century, the gradual marginalisation of religion and the secularisation of society. The secularisation of society was expressed in terms of a process of disenchantment by Max Weber, a contemporary of Benjamin. He was a German sociologist, philosopher, and political economist concerned with understanding the processes of rationalisation and secularisation that he associated with the rise of capitalism and modern science. In a lecture called "Science as a Vocation", he coined the term disenchantment to describe these processes.

...there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanted. One need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious powers existed. Technical means and calculations perform the service. (Weber, 1919)

He viewed the secularisation of society as a move away from a chiefly religious society, a "golden age of community" and "cosmological coherency", to an age of reason, science, rationality and industrialisation (Bennett, 2001, p. 3). The secular society can be defined by the rise of the rational subject, of liberal and democratic states; the turn to psychological self-reflexivity; dominance of secularism, nationalism, capitalism, industrialism, urbanism, consumerism, scientism (Saler, 2006, p. 2). Rationalisation systematises knowledge, secularises metaphysical concerns and replaces traditional bonds as the basis of social order (Bennett, 2001, p. 57).

One learns to relate to things by seizing upon their structure or logic, upon the principle of their organisation, rather than, say, by discerning their inherent meaning as parts of a cosmos or by engaging their sensuous appeal in a worlds alive with animate bodies large

and small. (Bennett, 2001, p. 58)

How unlike the ways in which the curiosity or the relic were seen and yet this is the climate from which, as I shall outline below, the objects of my study emerge in their contemporary form. If they are like relics and their practice, then how can one explain their continued existence in an age of Weberian disenchantment?

Recent reappraisals of the disenchantment narrative, however, give the possibility of an explanation. Jane Bennett argues that “enchantment never really left the world but only changed its forms” (Bennett, 2001, p. 91). The Christian cosmological form may have been lost through rationalisation and secularisation, as viewed by Weber, but other forms remain. Michael Saler offers a further explanation in his discussion of literary ‘virtual realities’ (Saler, 2003; Saler, 2012). He argues that, during the late nineteenth century, writers created worlds which “re-enchanted modernity”. Firstly, in characters like Sherlock Holmes, whose scientific use of the imagination “offered an alternative to the narrower instrumental reason” (Saler, 2004, p. 599). Secondly, through the readers’ use of the “ironic imagination”, or “a form of the modernist double consciousness” that allows the reader to be delighted but not deluded (Saler, 2004). Therefore, the question is not whether enchantment has been corrupted by modernity but about the ways in which it has changed or been translated in the context of modernity. There is the possibility that its loss is not total but perhaps selective, allowing glimpses of enchantment. It is through these glimpses that I hope to answer this question of my object’s continued significance and display.

Biographical Museums in the United Kingdom

As well as defining my objects, it is necessary to consider the context from which the modern practices of the display of these objects emerged. After all, objects like Babbage’s brain, Dickens’ quill and Freud’s blanket are not currently displayed in isolation. Unlike the relic, curiosity and Romantic collector’s prized objects, these pieces of material biography are displayed in museums: the Science museum in London, Dickens museum in London and Freud museum in London respectively. I, therefore, saw it as equally important to undertake a chronology of biographical displays as well as the chronology of object examples. Again, there is a problem of terminology: should they be called just historic house museums or, as some have called it, ‘personality’ museums (Forgan, 2012)? The former is too generic a term whereas the latter term could seem to trivialise the museums. The term that I intuitively used from early in the research was biographical display or museum because displays or museums like these seek to communicate, or narrate, the life of their subject, just as a biographer does their subject.

The origins of biographical museum practice lie in the literary tourism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The figures who attracted the Romantic collectors, mentioned earlier, were also the subjects of extensive tourist activity. As part of their Grand Tours of Italy, eighteenth-century travellers could visit the places mentioned in the works of Shelley and

Keats, and the places they lived and (in Shelley's case) died. During the nineteenth century, these literary pilgrimages were being undertaken in Britain as well. It blossomed into a popular tourist activity encouraged by travel guides such as *Homes and Haunts of the Most Eminent British Poets* (1847), including places associated with Walter Scott, Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Milton, Shelley, and Burns (Howitt, 1847). The places that drew the tourists were a combination of former houses, places of birth and death, as well as locations which either influenced or were featured in the works of those literary figures. For example, enthusiasts for Wordsworth's work could visit the several different houses in which he had lived as well as the locations that had inspired his works, see the "host of golden daffodils, beside the lake, beneath the trees" (Wordsworth, 1804). The trees that surrounded Wordsworth-associated sites were stripped of their leaves by souvenir hunters.

Much of the literature about biographical museums focus on this literary tourism and writer's houses and originates in literature studies. Nicola Watson (2006) has written in detail about the history of literary tourism and literary sites, which she describes as "cradles" and "workshops of genius" (the study). She makes the case that these sites can be read as texts. She argues that readers' "desire to map the imaginary onto the actual" was an impulse which was born out of the nineteenth-century love of biography and realist fiction (Watson, 2006, p. 201). Harald Hendrix, too, views these houses as author texts but then describes them both as sources of inspiration and as sites "to establish a kind of contact with the author and the imaginative world he had created" (Hendrix, 2012, p. 7). I will examine this idea of the biographical museum as an extension of the writer's works but consider it in relation to the biographical object displayed in former homes, and as applied to non-literary subjects. Hendrix has written about early literary tourism associated with the Grand Tour (Hendrix, 2009), and the ways in which writers' houses were both sites of self-fashioning and cultural memory (Hendrix, 2012). He argues that these houses have meaning beyond their "documentary value" as writer's biography, being a "medium of expression and of remembrance" (Hendrix, 2012, p. 1). His argument begins to introduce the notion of the biographical museum without naming it as such, and without questioning how this might work in a curated former home, something I will examine.

Alison Booth has written about Dickens and the commercialisation of his legacy (Booth, 2009) and more generally about literary houses (Booth, 2012). She states that these houses can be read as "kinds of biography" but considers these houses as aggregations of collective biography: author, family, friends, collectors, donors, trustees and curators (Booth, 2012, p. 233). Like Hendrix, she considers that audiences are looking for "explanatory icons images of sites of birth or source of inspiration" (Booth, 2012, p. 237). She also describes the importance of the study and "one of the most important categories of items in authors' houses [objects that] represent the act of writing", concurring with Watson (Booth, 2012, p. 238). Objects and locations that are connected to creativity are significant in biographical display, this is something I will examine more closely in Chapter Two. Booth briefly mentions what she

describes as academic embarrassment about author worship (Booth, 2012, p. 233). This is something that is also mentioned by Watson but is more obvious in books by Simon Goldhill (2011) and Anne Trubek (2011). These modern equivalents of the nineteenth-century “homes and haunts” books approach literary sites with a distinct air of scepticism in the writer’s house museum.

All these writers examine literary houses and this reflects the dominance in writing about biographical museums of literary subjects. However, Sophie Forgan (2012) has written about the museums of three scientists, including Darwin. Hers is an overview of the houses’ history as a museum and their ‘keepers of the flame’. It does not question the differences that might be present between presenting the lives of scientists and those of literary subjects or how the literary house museum may have influenced the house museums of subjects from other backgrounds. With each of these writers the focus is predominantly on the site and not its contents. There is little literature which focuses specifically upon the display of contiguous objects within this type of site. Caterina Albano (2007) writes from the perspective of a curator but is preoccupied with the objectivity of the display. She argues that the myths that surround her biographical subject (Gregor Mendel) are a problem to be overcome rather than an inevitable part of biographic display. This allies her to those academic sceptics described above but is interesting specifically for its treatment of a scientist’s objects and what should and should not be displayed. Clare Pettit (2008) provides a useful analysis of the literary (fictional) artefacts juxtaposed with biographical objects in the Dickens Museum in London: where the products of the subject’s life (novels, in Dickens’ case) dominate their everyday objects. Even in these texts, there is little examination of any relationship that exists between the objects and their context.

Other writing about biographical displays comes from art history and arts management studies. Here there is more consideration given to this possible relationship. Pat Cooke, in an essay about Kilmainham Gaol as a Nationalist shrine, also makes the direct analogy between the relics and objects that once belonged to Irish political prisoners in the gaol (such as Lacey’s tooth and Plunkett’s Spectacles) and relics (Cooke, 2008). He goes further with the analogy by classifying these in the manner of the church’s typology: the tooth as a first-class relic and the spectacles as a second-class relic.

Lucy McDiarmid, in her essay “Secular Relics: Casement’s Boat, Casements Dish” (2002), draws a comparison between objects and relics and uses the Catholic definitions of the relic and their practices to draw out her analogy. She proposes that the story of the various hands that the object has passed through provides authentication as a Casement relic, in addition to the story of its association with Casement. This is an example of “object biography”, which is an anthropological term introduced by Igor Kopytoff in his essay, “The Cultural Biography of Things” (1986). For Kopytoff, the object’s biography is a summation of what had happened to the object up until the present: the objects’ owners, contexts, and uses. It is also analogous to relic authentication. McDiarmid goes on to argue that the Casement objects reveal how cultural

importance can be constructed by the various participants in the objects' biography. She takes this further by placing the objects directly in the narrative action of Casement's biography, making them "active agents" in his story. Her essay reiterates the notion of the object biography, but by describing the objects as "active agents" she hints at a notion closer to my understanding of the biographical object. If these objects are agents in my subject's lives, then they can be understood as biographical material.

Early in my research I decided that my approach to the objects and their display would not focus on describing audience experience through ethnographic work, as I did not believe that this method would add to the study in any useful way. Firstly, because if these objects are similar to relics the viewer response could be a personal and potentially instinctual experience. Methods such as visitor research would struggle to authentically record experiences and responses to the objects. If as Martin Jay describes, "...only the subject really knows what he or she has experienced", then we must rely on their ability to candidly communicate that experience (Jay, 2006, p. 6). However, if as Walter Benjamin argued there has been a decline in communicable experience since World War I, then what we learn from the narrated experience is likely to be fragmentary and forced (Benjamin, 1999e). Secondly, because the individual response is inextricably linked with a wider cultural response. The museum is a site where the viewer is engaged with both public narratives created by the display and personal narratives associated with the subject of the museum: their own life histories combined with the cultural histories of the museum (Bagnall, 2003, p. 87). The experience of these objects is cultural, historical and shared. The biographical object and its display should be considered as part of a collective experience. It is a matter not just of audience response but of cultural practice (both by curators and viewers). Therefore, this research seeks to investigate the cultural disposition toward the object rather than specific audience responses, intending to diagnose the objects and their display as a phenomenon of modern museum practice.

I therefore undertook a survey of biographical objects and their displays, beginning with the former. The kinds of objects that are preserved and displayed for their association with a particular person vary enormously. Whereas the relic had been clearly demarcated into those three classes of bodily, contact and *brandea*, the kinds of biographical object displayed for their association since the nineteenth century were more complex. Discussions of relics identify three levels of association with bodily being the most closely associated and *brandea* being the least. It seems to be that biographical object might also have different degrees of association. Objects displayed for their association include physical remnants like locks of hair, clothing, objects used by the subject in their work (pens, desks, instruments), everyday objects (cups, walking sticks), decorative objects, the works created by the subject (manuscripts, paintings), portraits, official documentation (passports) and, in the case of artists and writers, there are the works themselves. Further, there are also objects which could have been used and ones that are similar to those that could have been used and, in some

instances, objects which are representations of the imagined worlds created by the subject.

The associations between the objects and their subjects are various and sometimes tenuous. Any system of classes for these objects could be extensive. However, it can be usefully narrowed to ten degrees of association (see below). More broadly these can be simplified to either associative or illustrative; contiguous objects and those with very little or no direct connection but illustrating the subject's life or works. The first three on the list are the most associated with the subject, moving outwards from the body. The next two gain priority through their relation to the subject's productive life, the thing for which they are celebrated. These are followed by objects that belonged to the subject but were not associated with their work. Finally, I have included things that I have observed find their way into biographical displays. They are illustrative of either life or work, but generally have tenuous connection to the subject.

1. Physical Remnants
2. Likenesses (death masks etc.)
3. Clothing etc.
4. Tools of the subject's trade
5. Articles of their direct production
6. Personal possessions
7. Everyday domestic items
8. Official documentation
9. Could have been or like those that
10. Reconstructions of fictional worlds

I then considered the subjects and their displays in museums and heritage sites. This kind of overview of biographical displays and museums has been relatively limited (Bryant, 2002; Young, 2015). However, in the existing literature (Hendrix, 2009; Watson, 2006; Watson, 2009), it is generally agreed that the first biographical museum can be said to be Abbotsford in Scotland opened to the public in 1833. Although Walter Scott had made it his habit of showing selected people around the house during his life, it was after his death that the house became what might be termed the first biographical museum in Great Britain. The next location to open to the public was Shakespeare's birthplace, which was 'rescued' for the nation in 1847, closely followed by Hall's Croft in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1849. The 1880's saw the opening of the museums for Robert Burns (1881), Thomas Carlyle (1883) and John Milton (1887), all of whom had also been subjects of earlier literary tourism.

I began my survey of museums and displays by using internet searches and the websites of museums of which I was already aware. This search expanded as connections were made

and new subjects found. The information collected was collated in a spreadsheet to enable easy organisation and expansion. Initially, the parameters of the survey were the subject's dates and field of occupation. With regard to the museums or displays themselves, the survey included their location, when they were founded, the type of organisation running them, and what type of display method was used for the objects. I also wanted, as with the objects, to consider the types of association that the subject had with the sites of their later display of objects. I, therefore, surveyed the type of association the subject had with the site, whether it was a birthplace, a workplace or a former home.

Two things became evident as the survey took shape: first, that certain figures dominated with sheer quantity of memorials (Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Dickens and William Morris all had multiple museums); second, that the dominance of literary figures in the literature reviewed reflects their dominance in the museums, although this seems to be shifting (see appendix). The early twentieth century saw the opening of museums to non-literary figures: art - Hogarth (1904); military - Nelson (1924); science - Darwin (1927); theatre - Ellen Terry (1929); and music - Elgar (1936). Of the museums now open to the public, 74% of them have subjects that were notable in the arts (literature, art, music), with the largest number being literary figures, followed by artists and a handful of composers and actors. There are only 10% in the sciences, the remainder being notable for great deeds (explorers or military figures), politics, or by blood (royalty or gentry). The reason for this may lie in the origins of the phenomena in literary tourism; however, the question remains, why might arts figures be more dominant than those in other fields are?

The birth and death dates of the subjects also revealed a pattern. Of the museums surveyed, just over half of the subjects of biographical museums could be called long nineteenth-century figures or, perhaps more accurately, Victorian and Edwardian figures. The years in which the museums had been founded proved more interesting. Although this type of display originated in the nineteenth century it really saw its flowering in its current form in the dying years of that century. Museum foundations were steady from the 1890's up until World War One and then there are peaks in activity between the wars and just after World War Two. There was a lull during the 1950s and then a steady rise until a peak in the 1980s. The rate has remained steady into the present.

The type of location is also significant: 69% of museums are located in the homes or very close to the homes of their subjects, with 17% being in or near the subject's birthplace and 7% in or near their workplaces (see appendix). The home then would seem to be the preferred site for this kind of museum. The importance of the domestic setting also explains the preferred display method used in these museums. Of the museums reviewed, 59% of them use a form of curation that involves the reconstruction of the subjects living or working environment, as opposed to only using the display cabinet as a means of showing their collection. This research considers these forms of curation and considers the dominance of one form over another in the display of contiguous objects than the other form.

The survey also briefly considered the types of custodians or organisations which have been left in charge of the museums and their objects, although this will not be a particular focus of this research. The majority of the museums are run by individual specialist societies or trusts set up specifically to take care of the subject's material legacy. There are a handful of private museums and some commercially run museums such as the Bede's World and Dickens World. The remaining sites are run by National Trusts (Scotland's trust is a separate institution), English Heritage and local government. In choosing examples to help investigate the objects and displays of this research, I wanted to find museums which fell into several of the categories of my survey: different locations, subject fields, custodians, and types of display. It was also important that they might reflect the wider phenomenon whilst having their own specificities. In addition, I made the decision not to allow the main focus to be on the museums or objects of literary figures, which so dominate the existing literature. However, because the survey has thrown up so many interesting and relevant examples, I will draw on some other examples in addition to my three main case studies.

The first case study is Down House near Bromley in Kent. This was Charles Darwin's home and workplace for forty years. The house is now a museum dedicated to Darwin's life and work. It was opened to the public as a Darwin museum in 1929 and is currently run by English Heritage. The ground floor of the house comprises rooms arranged as they would have been in the 1860s. The first floor has a series of connected exhibitions which narrate Darwin's life and work. The garden and greenhouse have been restored to his design. At the end of the garden visitors are able to walk a circular woodland path which Darwin created, called the Sandwalk or his thinking path.



Figure 1 - Down House - Darwin's Home. Photograph: Caroline Morris

This museum is in a semi-rural location and based in a former home. It is run by English Heritage, and previously by the British Association for the Advancement of Science and the Royal College of Surgeons. The displays are a mixture of reconstructed living space and modern cabinet display. During 2009, to celebrate the bicentenary of his birth and the 150th anniversary of the publication of *On the Origin of the Species*, there was a series of exhibitions and events including “Darwin’s Big Idea” at the Natural History Museum which included a reconstruction of his study. The types of objects on display at Down House come from a cross section of my object survey. As a museum dedicated to a scientist, it is in a minority of biographical museums surveyed. Darwin’s cultural importance is tied to his scientific ideas and perceived genius; he is heralded as a scientific icon or even secular saint. The paradox comes from the nature of his work (used to substantiate certain atheist assertions) and the semi-religious manifestations of appreciation or adoration for his work. In terms of a study questioning these objects as secular relics, a scientist’s relics may be the most problematic.

The second case study chosen was the Elgar Birthplace Museum and Visitor Centre in Lower Broadheath near Worcester. This site comprises a purpose-built visitor centre and the small detached house in which composer Sir Edward Elgar was born. Although this was his birthplace he only lived in the house for a couple of years, yet it is a site which continued to fascinate its former inhabitant. The museum was founded in 1935 by his daughter Carice on the basis of his direct wish. It is run by the Elgar Foundation, a charitable trust. It consists of a visitor’s centre containing a shop, the archive and a circular display focusing on the works.



Figure 2 - Elgar Birthplace – Photograph: Caroline Morris

There is also the Birth house which contains rooms curated with wooden framed cases, many of which are from the original 1935 displays.

This museum is in a rural location with the local area being christened Elgar Country and a walking/driving tour called the Elgar route. It is run by a specialist charity and staffed by volunteers and therefore does not have the benefits of the museums run and funded by large organisations like the National Trust. The displays are all contained in cabinets, and the types of objects on display are eclectic but not as comprehensive as the Darwin museum. This is a museum dedicated to a musician and composer. Like many literary museums, the visitor is encouraged to experience the sites of his creative inspiration and to associate the place and its objects with the subject's creative work, in this case music (especially through the use of audio guides). Elgar's cultural importance lies in his status as the preeminent English Romantic composer who was inspired by, and has become representative of, the English landscape and ruralism. This museum was also chosen as it is representative of a particular type of museum. These are houses in which the subject only briefly lived, yet have become sites for biographic museums. The way that this museum has been very carefully constructed by its subject and his descendants is specific to this museum but is indicative of the construction of biographical significance in the wider sector.

The final case study is more unusual. It can be fitted into the following survey parameters: urban location, commercially run, displayed using both reconstruction and cabinets. The objects fit into most of the object survey parameters, its subject could be described as a scientist and his works can be considered as culturally important. However, unlike Darwin and Elgar, this subject is entirely fictional. The Sherlock Holmes museum is based at 221b Baker Street in London, the fictional home of the 'legendary' detective for twenty-five years. The museum, founded in 1990, is a commercial operation. It comprises a first floor of rooms curated as if still in use, a second floor containing rooms with some 'original' furniture and



Figure 3 - 221b Baker Street - Sherlock Holmes Museum. Image: Edward Harding-Murray

wooden vitrines and a third floor with a series of waxwork figures based upon Holmes' major cases. The objects on display relate to both daily life and his work; in addition, there are examples of different editions of the books, and objects that appeared in their illustrations. Holmes is perhaps the greatest fictional detective, has an ongoing literary influence, and is an internationally recognisable character. The museum is part of a larger tourist phenomenon of promoting places associated with popular fiction, although these more generally involve tourist trails rather than museums.

Why then choose this commercial museum down the road from Madame Tussaud's? Consider the second aspect of Cornelia Parker's work that I found so intriguing in her work "The Maybe". This relates to questions which arose concerning the authority of the artist/curator to narrate, articulate and even authenticate the object being displayed and, the question which is more important, the authenticity of the objects or the narrative which underlies its display. The Baker Street museum uses the same museum tools as Down House and, despite its subject's fictional origins, I found myself suspending my disbelief. The success of this museum is its simulation of 'authentic' biographical museums for an entirely fictional subject. In this museum there is no authenticity except in reference to the books themselves. So in this instance, the narrative underlying the display is more important than the authenticity of the objects. However, the two may not be the opposites first supposed but inextricably intertwined. The line between the authentic and fictional could be blurred in this form of displaying objects (as it was in relic practice). The question then becomes whether this is a problem. Therefore, because of its fictional basis and mimicry, this museum may provide a way of further commenting on the biographical object phenomena.

The following thesis seeks to interrogate biographical objects and displays in modern museum practice. It begins with the objects then moves to the context and its subject, and concludes by attending to the audience relationships with object, place and subject. Questions of authenticity, aura and narratives of association with a subject run throughout the chapters.

Chapter One, "Biographical objects and the changing rhetoric of display in Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century", demonstrates that narrative or associative objects have been displayed for centuries. This despite shifts in the ways objects' meanings were conveyed and interpreted through reliquaries, *Wunderkammern* and the nineteenth-century encyclopaedic public museums. Chapter One focuses on objects and how display enables their association or significance to be communicated, how it draws out what Parker called their "little histories". How has the meaning and significance of objects been drawn out through display? Are some types of display more suited to biographical objects and might this explain them? The chapter examines the changing rhetoric of display in the nineteenth and early twentieth century which provides an explanation for later tensions present in the museum curation of biographical objects. This analysis of their display illustrates the ways in which elements of older display and representational practices (like relic and curiosity) exist in modern museums. This chapter also considers the changing nature of authenticity in the shifting interpretations of objects.

Parker used her objects and their “little histories” as sculptural material she could manipulate. Chapter Two, “Residues of the Past: significant traces and the Romantic sensibility in the biographical object”, considers the associative object as a repository of the past or, more specifically, as material narrative which can be perceived as a quality inherent in the object, rather than as an arranged narrative, as in Chapter One. What was it about the nineteenth century that produced biographical museums and, more than that, the particular quality of past-ness which is manifested as either aura or trace? Traces of the past adhere to the object as wear; such decay can enhance significance, especially when associated with a celebrated subject’s work. The valuing of signs of creative effort is connected to the appeal of the idea of the genius and the biographical or associative object is evidence of the power of personality in history. This chapter addresses the ways in which the subject’s association with the object, and then the object with the viewer, seems to imply something similar to consecration (described earlier in this Introduction): as though the subject’s life permeates their objects, an example of what Stephen Bann termed “structures of transference” (Bann, 1984, p. 102).

Chapter Three, “At Home in the Biographical Museum: the home as an expression of the self, and its reconstruction as a museum”, turns to consider the sites of the objects display. The apparent embeddedness of biographical display in home and everyday life is an element of the phenomena which is least like relic practice. However, the survey of biographical object display showed that former homes are preferred sites for such displays and a preferred technique is the reconstruction in the subject’s former home. What is it about these homes, which makes them prime display sites? The dominance is ingrained enough in the phenomenon that a variant of it is written into the English Heritage Conservation Principles.

The way in which an individual built or furnished their house, or made a garden, often provides insight into their personality, or demonstrates their political or cultural affiliations. It can suggest aspects of their character and motivation that extend, or even contradict, what they or others wrote, or are recorded as having said, at the time, and so also provide evidential value. (English Heritage, 2008, p. 29)

Chapter Three considers the use of the subject’s home as a vehicle for their material biography, and the boundary zone between public and private life. The domestic interior that emerged during the nineteenth century was a material expression of the construction of self, the influence of which continued into the twentieth century and produced the home as the primary site for biographical museums. The ways in which a subject arranges their home to reflect themselves, and the ways in which the museum arrange the objects to reflect the subject, may be analogous to the manipulation of “little histories” in the gallery.

Chapter Four, “Channelling the subject in biographical museums: Object and museum as ‘medium’ for speaking with the dead”, considers the network of relationships between object, subject and viewer. The pilgrim looked for contact with the saint through their objects. Might the modern viewer look for the same? Do biographical objects and their displays enable a form of contact with the dead? The peaks in museum foundations observed through my survey

shows peaks pre- and post-World War One, a time which saw an increase in communication technology and simultaneously the flourishing of spiritualist attempts to talk to the dead, through mediums. Chapter Four examines the biographical museum and its objects as media for communicating with the subject. It proposes a form of museum psychometry. The reconstructed living space outlines the subject's absence and enables the visitor's imagination to 'manifest' the subject by filling the gaps. Along with walking in the subject's footsteps, such curatorial prompts enable a sense of proximity and communication with the simulated subject.

Chapter Five questions the influence the visitor brings to the reading of the object and its display site. It examines the way that the visitor's understanding of, and connection to, the works of the biographical subject affect the way they approach the biographical display. Whether the viewer is resistant or receptive to the museum's rhetoric can alter the kind of relationship the viewer has with the biographical object, museum and its subject. Even their relic-ness may be dependent. From a selection of examples, it considers the viewer both as a Romantic pilgrim and as a sceptic, but argues that these are not static but shifting positions. This concluding chapter goes on to argue that the biographical display, or museum, occupies an intersection between the many apparent oppositions that have emerged over the course of this thesis: fact and fiction (narrativity), past and present, public and private, near and distant, the pilgrim and the sceptic. It also provides a summation of the whole thesis arguing that whilst contemporary display of these narratively rich objects could be considered as an anachronistic survival, it is in fact profoundly influenced by the modern period from which it originated.

Chapter 1

Biographical Objects and the Changing Rhetoric of Display in Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century.

Consider for a moment a notebook, a pair of glasses and a pipe; then consider them as Darwin's notebook, Elgar's glasses and Holmes' pipe. The latter are considered to be more meaningful than the former by their association with these three particular lives. They are not displayed for what they are (a notebook, glasses, a pipe), but for what they have been to someone, and what that someone is to the displaying, and viewing, society. Similar kinds of contiguous objects have been collected and displayed for centuries despite shifts in the ways the meaning of objects had been interpreted, the ways meaning has been conveyed through display and in what society required from the displayed material world. The objects of this study are analogous to relics; and yet, the development of the display of biographical objects, as it seen today, originates in the nineteenth-century heyday of public museums. The interpretation of the object and the ways which display was used to facilitate such interpretation differs markedly between medieval relic practice and the nineteenth-century public museums, in method, context and rationale. Despite this, biographical object display can be understood in relation to both practices. However, such objects prove problematic and are not entirely compatible with established museum practice as will become clear as this chapter progresses. These types of objects are seldom displayed prominently within the large public museums, being more usually found in separate displays specifically dedicated to individual figures, or otherwise integrated into the more general display.

In order to understand what is happening in contemporary biographical display and its persistence throughout the period of modernity, it is necessary to consider how meaning can, and has been, drawn out through display before, during and after the nineteenth-century public museum. Specifically, I want to ask if some types of display are more suited to the objects of this study and whether this might provide an explanation for them. In order to do this, the chapter will examine the changing rhetoric of displayed objects by paying attention to the display techniques used for the relic, the curiosity and the nineteenth-century museum specimen. It will consider the ways in which the biographical object is either compatible with that means of display or troubling to it. In making these comparisons, this chapter will begin to question the analogous relation of the relic and the contiguous object and consider the ways these objects disturb the modern museum.

This chapter is divided into three sections which broadly follow what seem to be three phases or shifts in display methods, contexts and rationales to which these objects have been

subject. The first considers the display of relics and of curiosities – a world of singular things where the object's significance was built through narratives. The second examines the object as a specimen that was classified, catalogued and displayed as a type in an explanatory series within the nineteenth-century public museum. This will provide the context from which biographical display emerged. The third considers the new museum display practices of diorama and period room which began to be used from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It will show how this last shift was both a response to the previous shift and a partial return to the earlier display rhetoric; one which provides a means of understanding the existence of biographical objects display.

As part of the examination of these objects as analogous to relics and curiosities, the means of their display proves illuminating. Stephen Bann (1995) has written about relic practice and the rhetoric of its display, comparing medieval reliquary practices to certain aspects of cabinets of curiosity practice. He also provides useful material on the display of the curiosity and its relation to contemporary museum display (2003). Bann provides a way of examining objects through which stories can be told, narrative objects. The fifteenth and sixteenth-century practice of displaying objects in cabinets as curiosities has been extensively written about as a predecessor to the museums which emerged in the nineteenth century. In her book, *Museums and the Shaping of Knowledge* (1992), Eileen Hooper-Greenhill considers what constitutes a museum and the ways the interpretation of displayed objects have altered: from displaying curiosities in private collections to the modern public museum. She questions the ways that curiosity cabinet displays have been described as unsystematic and eclectic, describing how they would have made cultural sense in their own time. She applies categories taken from Foucault's *The Order of Things* (2002) regarding the shifts in underlying structures of knowledge production, to examine the development of the modern museum: from the medieval to the Renaissance; from the Enlightenment to the nineteenth-century public museums. In doing so, she describes a series of museum "epistemes".¹ These prove useful in examining the different possible phases of biographical object display.

However, in order to understand the display of biographical objects, it is necessary to examine the nineteenth-century context from which these practices emerged. Biographical objects proved problematic to these new taxonomies of display, being anomalous in the context of late eighteenth and nineteenth-century projects to create great material encyclopaedias. However, towards the end of the century there was a shift in emphasis. The historian Stephen Conn (1998) has examined the nineteenth-century public museum and the shift in display methods that were heavily influenced by natural history museums. He considers the rise and demise of a scientific mode of curating objects in American museums which sought to educate the public in the new sciences without recourse to stories and spectacles.

¹ Epistemes being the structures underlying the production of knowledge in a particular time and place. Foucault describes the classical, the Renaissance and the modern episteme (Foucault, 2002)

Barbara Kirschenblatt Gimblett (1998) examines the processes of exhibiting cultural artefacts in academic and cultural institutions. More specifically, she discusses the changes that occurred in the display of natural history and anthropological objects towards the end of the nineteenth century and analyses the difference between the series display (which dominated the mid-century museums) and the diorama (which emerged as museum practice in the early twentieth century). Biographical object display emerged from this shifting museum framework at the beginning of the twentieth century. It is indicative of a shift in expectations regarding the role of objects and their display in museums.

Speaking Objects – How Relic and Curiosity Display Narrates its Objects

In this first section, the displayed objects under discussion are those which are singular for their particular associations; their meaning and value are based on specificity and this is, in most cases, not visibly obvious. This can describe objects defined as relics and curiosities as well as the objects of this study. Take, for example, Henry VIII's hawking hood or Edward the Confessor's gloves (MacGregor, 1983, p. 93): they are physically unique as handmade objects; and they are perceptually unique, through association with a meaningful time, place and person. No other object could be said to have precisely that contiguous relationship with these individuals at a particular time and in a particular place.

In this section I will consider both the display of relics and curiosities as a means of investigating the display of objects that tell stories and carry multiple meanings, and to analyse how this meaning is formed and then communicated through display. These two sorts of objects are different in many ways: in context (churches versus what were generally private residences) and in the reasons for display (part of religious practice versus individual collecting practices). However, as will be shown, both types of object were vehicles for narratives and their arrangement was a means of allowing those stories to be told. This argument will inform my study of the later nineteenth and early twentieth-century biographical object displays which, as I have suggested, would seem to retain traces of this early set of display practices. An examination of these pre-Enlightenment object displays will provide contrast to the object displays of the mid-nineteenth century, which reacted to and succeeded them.

The relic and the curiosity are significant regardless of any physical property they might have because their significance is based upon associations with somebody or something extraneous to their basic properties. These associations mean that there are multiple narratives associated with the objects, whether relic or curiosity. These narrative-rich objects exist because and for their narrative: they owe their existence to the narratives that created them. For example, the Becket casket (Figure 1) which was one of many reliquary caskets made to house the relics of Thomas Becket, tenth-century Archbishop and English martyr,



Figure 1 - Becket Casket - Images © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

whose shrine dominated Canterbury Cathedral until its destruction during the Reformation. This reliquary casket, now in the collection of the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, is made of gilt copper and decorated in enamel. It is typical of many reliquaries, which tended to be heavily decorated boxes of various sizes. Many were held in churches which were as heavily decorated as their reliquaries; others were personal reliquaries for private devotion, which varied further in shape and size.

The casket was the means by which the hidden relics of Thomas Becket were presented to the pilgrim. When in use as a reliquary for St Thomas' relics, the significance of these hidden objects was not just a simple communicated statement of contact – such as “these are the relics of Thomas Becket”, whether bones or fragments of clothing. Relics were highly narrativized objects. Their significance was built from multiple stories, making a series of connections. These were stories of the association with the original contact, the association of the object to its referent, whether that is a person, place or event and the object. For example, such stories would have included the story of Thomas Becket's holy life and violent martyrdom for his defiance of the King at the hands of three knights. There had to be the stories of the miracles that have occurred in relation to the relic and the subject, which show the authenticity of the objects and the subject's worthiness for beatification. There were also stories of the object's movement between the moment of original contact and its most recent display, both of which are crucial to the object's meaning. It is the provenance that confirms significance. For the churches that housed the relic, the narrative of its journey to the church constructs not only the relic's significance but also the significance of the church (Geary, 1988; Sumption, 1975; Walsham, 2010). In both cases, objects become something through which to tell stories. The relic needed the narratives that became attached to it. These narratives were sufficient to establish an object's significance and authenticity (though a

medieval sense of authenticity was very different to the modern one). Therefore, the display of such an object required specific display techniques to communicate those stories to the faithful who wished St Thomas to intercede on their behalf.

Curiosities, on the other hand, were displayed in elaborately decorated cabinets or chambers, alongside a multitude of other disparate objects, arranged according to the requirements of the collector, who would control access to them. In rare cases, these collections became opened for public viewing, for example, the collection of the John Tradescants (father 1570s-1638 and son 1608-1662). Gardeners to Charles I, they travelled the world collecting plants and obtaining natural wonders and curious things as they progressed. They opened the first public museum in England in the 1630s called the Ark (Brown, 2010). Many of their 'curiosities' found their way into the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, which continues to display some of them. Alongside the extensive plant collections, the Ark, like many of the more lavish Royal collections of Europe, contained natural and artificial wonders: like "...medals, fossils, shells ...feathers from a phoenix, dragon's eggs..." (Potter, 2006, p. xxv). There were also objects comparable to the relic but have a narrative association with secular figures. "Among the artificial rarities are ... by virtue of their association with historical Persons...Edward the Confessor's gloves, Ann Boleyn's veil and gloves, Henry VIII's gloves, stirrups, hawk's hood, and dog-collar, a 'Trunion' of Captain Drake's ship..." (MacGregor, 1983, p. 104).

In this collection of curiosities, the objects were also narratively rich. They would carry stories of their journey from origin to the current site, stories of the collector's relationship to the objects, stories created by their position in a collection. Many of the natural wonders would have been viewed through 'supernatural' narratives, connected to myths, fables and superstitions: unicorn horns, witch's bottles, dragon's eggs. The curiosities associated with particular people, places or events would have narratives of association: for example, the



Figure 2 - Henry VIII's hawking glove and Hawk's hood - Images © Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford

glove and hood, shown in Figure 2. As former possessions of Henry VIII, they carry stories of their association with Henry VIII, his life, his love of hawking, as well as those telling how the objects came into the collection. This glove is not just a glove, but one that can connect the collector and the viewer back to a particular person, therefore these narratives were critical to the way that the object would be read by the viewer/visitor.

If these objects are so reliant upon their stories for meaning and authenticity, then these stories must be communicated in some way to overcome illegibility. The object cannot tell us its own narratives. On its own the object could be illegible. For example, consider the first image of Figure 3. Initially, it might appear to be a twig or, once its scale is clear, a thorn taken from a tree or bush. Actually, this is believed to be a holy thorn taken from the crown of thorns worn by Christ during the crucifixion. The thorn cannot communicate its significance as being taken from THE Crown of Thorns and the risk is that it might appear to be natural detritus; the connection and associations are not visibly obvious. Yet, this thorn was overlaid with narratives not only of the crucifixion but of what happened to the crown afterwards up until its display. To access these stories, and to substantiate the relic, the relic owner needed a further layer of representation. The object alone was not sufficient to convey them. It could not speak its own narratives; it was mute. “As a physical object, divorced from a specific milieu, a relic is entirely without significance. Unlike other objects, the bare relic— a bone or a bit of dust— carries no fixed code or sign of its meaning...” (Geary, 1990, p. 5).

These objects’ meaning was hidden without some form of external explanation, provided by its means of display. The relic’s context was a key to decode the meaning of the relic yet even that context was only legible if one knew how to read them. The relics then did not speak;



Figure 3 – Thorn detail and the Holy Thorn Reliquary - Images © The Trustees of the British Museum

rather they were read to the pilgrims by the reliquary, the church, and the monks. The relic was narrated by the context in which it was displayed (examined more closely later in the chapter). Medieval cathedrals "...were constructed to contain all the information in the world for those who knew the codes" (Griffiths, 2008, p. 17). In an object world where every object could hold a hidden meaning, be a code or a symbol, the illegibility of an object did not present a problem as it might in later centuries. Such imagery would have been used to teach the scriptures, and therefore much of it would have been understood by the pilgrim or churchgoer. Where this initiation was lacking, the allegories would potentially be misunderstood without explanation from someone who knew.

The images and sculptures (objects of devotion) within medieval cathedrals and churches were not simply representations of Holy figures; they were perceived to be that which they represented, for example, a statue of a saint was not simply a representation of that saint but was that saint: "...representation and presentation were more closely allied than they are now, to the extent that the signifying image was worthy of honour of the signified" (Aston, 2003, p. 69). It is this close alliance between representation and presentation that allows a blurring between the thing and its referent. To the modern viewer, the sculptures and paintings would stand in a metaphorical relation: the association between the object and that which it represented being one of similarity, correspondence. The object could represent its referent because it was similar to or suggestive of something else. However, to the medieval mind the relationship between the image/object and its referent, rather than being representative, would seem to be transubstantial. The image or sculpture of the saint was worth the same honour as the saint not merely because it represented them but because it *became* them. If that was the case, the attempt to communicate with the saint through their objects of devotion becomes more understandable. For monks and scholars, these creative representations were primarily tools for meditation and inspiration (Hahn, 2011, p. 164).

The allegorical perception of the medieval viewer, the propensity to see the symbolic in the everyday, allows for the object having a meaning beyond its physical appearance. It allowed significance to be built narratively, through stories, and for the real world to be mingled with fables. Although, this allegorical thinking may have allowed for hidden meaning, it did nothing to help elucidate the meaning to the uninitiated.

The curiosity, whilst not transubstantial like the relic, was subject to allegorical perception. The curiosity was also a cipher, more so than the relic, and whilst comparison can and will be made here, it is important to understand that the curiosity was an anathema to the church. Whilst there are some theological connections in curiosity practice, it was heavily associated with early modern science. In the cathedrals and some churches, natural wonders such as crocodile carcasses hung from chains or turtle carapaces were displayed to show the myriad wonders of God and his creation (MacGregor, 2007, p. 7; Griffiths, 2008). However, in the curiosity cabinet, these objects were presented as natural curiosities. Whilst some collections saw being curious about the world, to seek to know high things, as a celebration of God's

works, curiosity was also viewed as showing a lack of faith and devotion, because it was to question, to try and explain the works of God (Ball, 2012, p. 11; Benedict, 2001, p. 5).

Consider Figure 4, if one ignores scale it is remarkably similar to the thorn, shown earlier. It too could be viewed as detritus; an old stick, its origin and its significance are unclear. However, once described by a cabinet as a unicorn's horn, it is immediately connected to a whole series of myths and fables. Curiosities were ciphers which if questioned correctly could reveal their hidden meanings; more than that, those meanings could be drawn out through their placement within the cabinet even when their meaning or value was not visibly evident. This understanding of objects was based on the notion that the world was made up of resemblances, similitude and multiple hidden relationships between objects and phenomena. This view was encouraged by neo-platonic philosophy which saw a correspondence between "the macrocosm (the universe as a whole) and the microcosm (the little world of the human body)" (Wootton, 2015, p. 235; Hooper-Greenhill, 1992, p. 89). Everything was endlessly related to everything else in the world in many different but hidden ways: the world was full of signs. The curiosity collections sought to contain the world in a cabinet, to materially summarise the world in one room, just as the cathedral had attempted to represent 'God's' creation: to show the "...correspondence ...between man and nature, between the microcosm and macrocosm" (Mauries, 2002, p. 43). To own a cabinet was to be privy to hidden knowledge which, for Renaissance aristocracy, provided signs of status (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992). Many cabinet owners had dual interests in alchemy and the occult, knowledge was power, for example, Emperor Rudolph, who had a vast and world-renowned cabinet of curiosities and



Figure 4 - "Ainkhurn", or unicorn horn - Image © KHM-Museumsverband

also a profound interest in the occult, which led to his acquaintanceship with infamous alchemist Dr John Dee (Elizabeth I's conjuror) (Woolley, 2002).

Certain of Tradescant's objects described earlier could, like relics, be called metonymic; the Henry VIII objects stand in a metonymic relation to their former owner: the glove or hawking hood standing as a part representing the absent royal whole. The connection to their Royal owner and the narratives that stem from this association are not visible in the objects. Without this connection, the reason for their presence in the collection would be hidden from the uninitiated. Arthur Macgregor says, in relation to curiosity,

In minds attuned to the elegant deployment of metaphor, no difficulty was presented by the requirement that certain components of a [curiosity] cabinet might be encoded with a complex range of meanings beyond any physical contribution they might make to the display and required a degree of subtle interpretation on the part of the viewer. (MacGregor, 2007, p. 57)

Its mysteriousness and involvement in myth, story and fable was not a problem for either the collector or the viewer of the object but the reason for the object's existence. Objects had hidden meanings and it was just a question of unravelling them. In addition, once in a larger collection the meanings of the objects were entered into a whole other series of relations with other objects which could increase the complexity of meaning.

The complexity of the seemingly endless hidden meanings was added to by the collector, who was the arbiter of much of the decipherment. In Eileen Hooper-Greenhill's study of Renaissance cabinets of curiosity, she proposes that the cabinets acted as more than cabinets of the world. She argues that the cabinets of the world are analogous to the theatres of memory. The art of memory was a technique for training and extending the memory that emerged in classical times (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992, p. 91). It was used in medieval monasteries and re-emerged during the Renaissance. It was a rhetorical technique to aid the memory of the orator who would imprint what required memorising onto the architectural features and contents of a building in the imagination. If this was the case, then the hidden meanings of the curiosity are further encrypted by the memory of the individual who brings these objects together and, therefore, has control of their decipherment.

This specific kind of meaning encryption is evident in Stephen Bann's discussion of curiosity collector John Bargrave and its written catalogues. Each object is described, followed by the circumstances of its collection; he then ends with a short anecdote² or memory: "...these little assemblages of small-scale objects must have required considerable narrative exposition, with the bizarre or humdrum circumstances of the collector's life intruding on the task of scrupulous description" (Bann, 2003, p. 123). The narrative associated with the object overlays any more general meaning it might have. Although not defined as a theatre of memory, it is clear that the objects within this collection are present for their memories. Each object's narrative is specific to Bargrave and not visibly obvious without this catalogue

² The anecdote, in relation to the biographical object, is examined in Chapter Three.

description. The meaning of the curiosity, whether isolated or in assemblage, could be as nebulous as the relic, especially if one considers the way that global trade and colonisation expanded the range of mythological traditions which could be drawn on. Groups of singular things are as difficult to read for the uninitiated as the isolated unique thing. The collector specificity added a layer of meaning to the already multifarious meanings. The objects need translation for the uninitiated viewer. "Curiosity...invariably presumes an authored display, or a display as a subjective act of enunciation" (Bann, 2003, p. 123). As such, the objects in the curiosity cabinet were only truly legible to the owner/collector, or when mediated through the owner. The 'truth' of the object becomes secondary to the meaning the collector applied to it. It also means that the collector has control of the object's meaning.

If the collection of curiosities was to be 'read' by anyone beyond the collector, then they would need to be able to decipher the objects. As has been outlined, these objects, whether relic or curiosity, were not obvious in their meaning. This means that without some external agency, or intermediary, the objects would remain ciphers: Henry's gloves would remain just another pair of gloves.

The ways in which the curators (whether of relic or curiosity) overcame this opacity in their object's meaning reveals the beginnings of display practice which still underpins the display practices discussed in this research.

... In order to effect this transmission, something essentially extraneous to the relic itself must be provided: a reliquary with an inscription or iconographic representation of the saint, a document attesting to its authenticity, or a tradition, oral or written, which identified this particular object with a specific individual or at least with a specific type of individual (a saint). (Geary, 1990, p. 6)

The exposition of this object story was manifested through oral, textual and visual means. In each case, the meaning is supplied by an intermediary and the viewers must rely upon that intermediary for decipherment. The mode of displaying unique objects, whether relic or curiosity, functioned to convey the object's hidden meaning.

The most immediate means of narrating the objects to the visiting pilgrims were the forebears of the tour guide: intermediaries between the relic and the viewer. A priest, prior or abbot would talk the pilgrim visitor through the relics and their reliquaries in the church/abbey's possession (Bann, 1995, p. 21). The abbot satirised by Erasmus, used as an example in Stephen Bann's essay "Shrines, Curiosities and the Rhetoric of Display", was preoccupied with the jewels upon the reliquary and their donors rather than the relics themselves. Even so, the 'stage management' of the relic appears to have needed a human intermediary such as the Abbot to testify to the relic's meaning and power. In relic practice, the guide speaks for the object.

To be a pilgrim at Canterbury was to take part in a performance. The prior in his role of master of ceremonies did not single out individual modes of representation featured in the

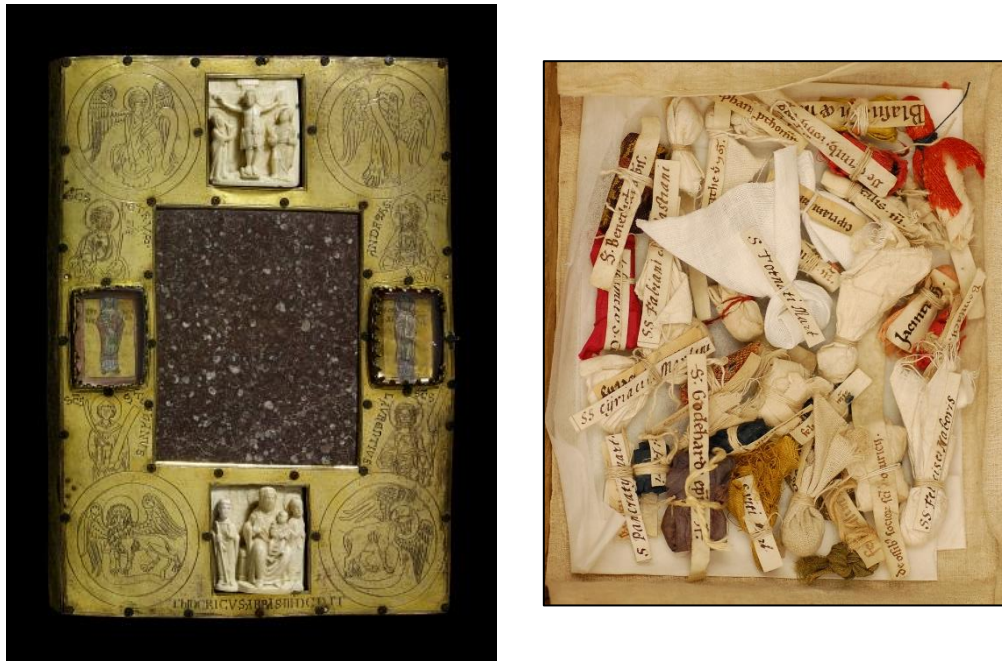


Figure 5 - Portable reliquary and contents - Images © The Trustees of the British Museum.

building...but animated a whole sequence of interrelating and interfused modes. (Bann, 1995, p. 21)

The oral element of narrative exposition was another means of heightening the religious experience of the pilgrim. Without this ‘animation’ of interrelated meanings, the significance the church was there to communicate would be lost or, at the very least, muddled.

The relics were also identified through textual means although this relied upon the pilgrim’s literacy: “...sacred objects [were] almost obsessively labelled and dated.” (Bann, 1995, p. 19) Although Bann is referring to an illustration of a particular shrine in Canterbury cathedral, many reliquaries included text in their decoration (Bagnoli, et al., 2011) and within reliquaries, unseen by the pilgrims, individual relic fragments were also labelled to enable identification (*Treasures of Heaven*, 2011). The image detail, Figure 5, shows the contents of a portable altar. This jumble of carefully wrapped fragments was contained beneath a marble panel, never on show unless the panel was unscrewed. Yet each of the parcels is carefully labelled. Most labels appear to be brief statements of association rather than any fuller description analogous to modern museum labels. However, they could not rely on the written label to communicate in a society with limited literacy.

The relic was rarely exposed unprotected to the faithful though close examination might show a glimpse of it. The object container was the primary tool of communicating its mute contents. The visual exposition it enabled did not require a literate viewer or necessarily a guide or demonstrator. To discuss the visual narration of the relic I will adopt the example that Stephen Bann uses in his 1995 essay cited above - the Stavelot Triptych (Figure 6). The objects of the display are fragments of the ‘True Cross’ which are just visible, arranged in a cross in the centre. The shape of the cross is obvious. However, this triptych goes further. The

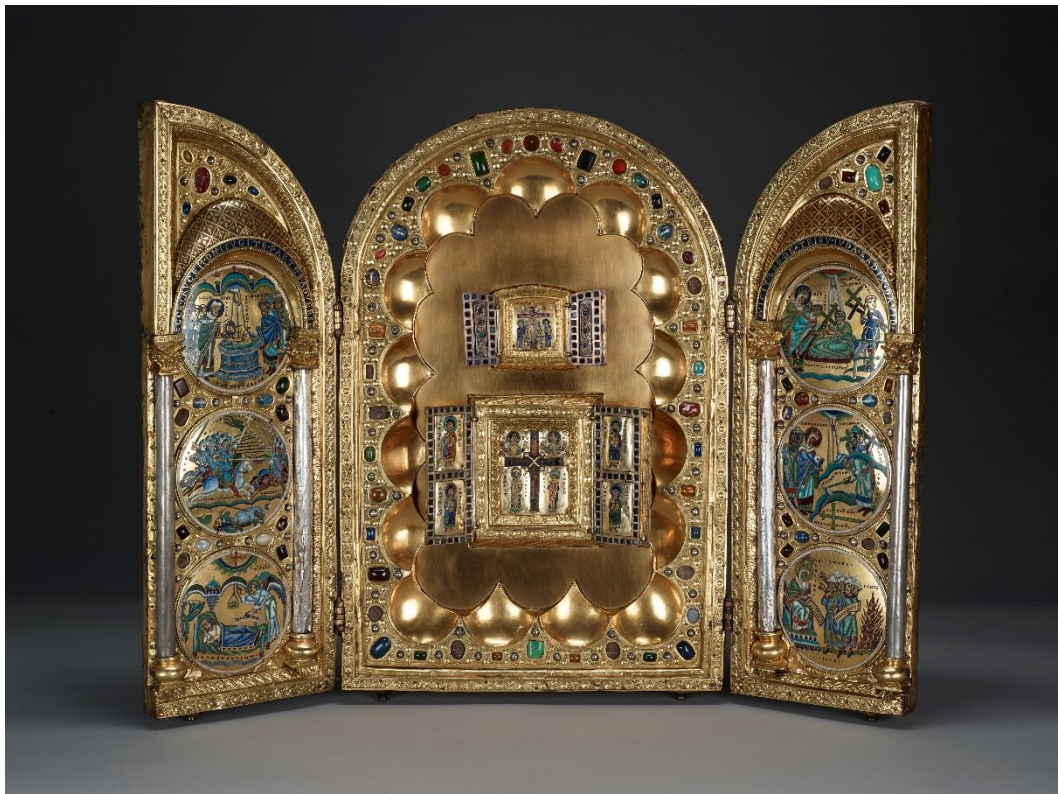


Figure 6. Stavelot triptych - The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York

roundels on the side panels perform the task of a guide. On one side, the three roundels depict the conversion of St. Constantine to Christianity whilst, on the other, the roundels illustrate the narrative of the wooden fragments at this reliquary's centre. The bottom roundel shows St Helena (St. Constantine's mother) in the Holy Land questioning Jewish leaders about the cross, above which the roundel shows St Helena watching servants digging up the cross. The final roundel shows St Helena testing three different crosses on a sick man, with a servant carrying away the two ineffective and therefore inauthentic crosses (Roberts, 2001).

Reliquaries like the Stavelot Triptych figuratively portray the object's narrative for the pilgrim enabling the relic's identification, the communication of its significance and provenance all in one place. Other reliquaries assumed the shape of the whole from which the relic was a fragment allowing the fragment 'artistic totality' (Bagnoli, et al., 2011): from true cross fragments in cross-shaped reliquaries to nails from the cross in elaborately decorated nail shaped reliquaries. There were also "Speaking Reliquaries" which took the form of the body part from which the relic fragment had originated (Bagnoli, et al., 2011). Reliquaries in the shape of arms, feet or heads made the fragments of bone whole again in ornate decorated metal. Although according to Cynthia Hahn, the content of these reliquaries do not always contain arm, feet or skull bones, and arm reliquaries were used, by some, theatrically "to extend or magnify their own gestures through the gestures of the saints" (Hahn, 2011, p. 166).

This was part of a larger mode of communication that existed in medieval churches. The decoration of the church turned them into giant immersive reliquaries, literally in the case of the Sainte-Chapelle in Paris which was built to house relics such as the Crown of Thorns amongst others (*Treasures of Heaven*, 2011). The context of display, whether reliquary or church, acted as a form of narrative exposition and construction. They were visual material storytellers or, to extend an analogy from Alison Griffiths, “Gothic cathedrals were complex communicative structures... Like three-dimensional sermons” (Griffiths, 2008, p. 18). To a society used to the church as an immersive three-dimensional sermon, the reliquary’s visual representations of the relic’s narrative would have been part of the same modes of reading objects: a means of allowing the objects to speak, to communicate their meaning.

The curiosity too requires similar degrees of meaning exposition despite the difference in context and motivation for collection. Like the relic, the means of exposition can be broken down into the same three methods though with different emphasis and forms. The textual exposition of the curiosity came, in many collections, from carefully constructed catalogues. John Bargrave’s collection was catalogued and filled with, as Bann stated, personal details and object biographies. “...Bargrave’s catalogue, which was, we may suppose, the condensed version of Bargrave’s curatorial notes – his ... way of narrativizing the objects of the collection.” (Bann, 1995, p. 28). Alternatively, as Lisa Jardine puts it, it was a ‘catalogue where he recorded what he felt about every object that he bought...this is a biography in a box’ (*World in a Box*, 2003). The catalogue stands as the narrative exposition for the collection, fully explaining the ‘significance’ of the objects displayed within and their specificity to Bargrave’s life. John Tradescant II also constructed a catalogue of his ‘rarities’.

With the visual narration of the curiosity, the means and emphasis are slightly different. Unlike reliquaries where firstly the objects were visible to the observer, which in relic practice was unusual and secondly, in general, only a single relic was displayed, the curiosity formed part of a collection in a cabinet or special chamber. The display rhetoric for curiosities was based upon correspondences and affinities between things. As discussed above the world was interrelated in hidden ways but through resemblances and correspondences between things. “Resemblance was positioned as a form of repetition and reflection, with the earth echoing the sky, and faces reflected in the stars.” (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992, p. 12). The objects in the cabinet were connected by webs of resemblances; art echoing nature, nature echoing art. Barbara Stafford, in her book *Devices of Wonder*, calls curiosity cabinets “...little museum[s] for the harmonisation of far-fetched things...” (Stafford and Terpak, 2001, p. 3). Their arrangement was a means of formulating a sense of coherence from a collection of otherwise disparate objects. In his book *Cabinets of Curiosity*, Patrick Mauries states, that “[cabinets were] ...devices ... to establish or emphasise the affinities that existed between things, to reveal the fundamental unity that lay beneath the welter of multiplicity” (Mauries, 2002, p. 34). Correspondences functioned in two ways in the cabinets. Firstly, there were

correspondences between the object and some aspect of the world which the collector considered it represented. This could be some wider phenomena outside the cabinet or to a fabled origin.

Secondly, correspondences were formed by the juxtaposition of objects into what Barbara Stafford called constellations. Humans imposed order onto the stars by seeing shapes or patterns in their arrangement, creating constellations. The constellations of objects in the curiosity cabinet are created by having the collector's ideas imposed upon them. However, the collector did not think they were imposing their ideas, merely revealing the natural and real associations between things. Correspondences were expected to be perceivable between objects.

The observer was encouraged to form their own narratives based on their interpretation of the sequence (though under the influence of the cabinet's owner). The cabinet performed the objects in a complex game of concealment and revelation. The objects could be revealed or concealed in whichever order the cabinet owner wished according to which narratives he wished to communicate. This might also depend on the audience; the exclusivity of the company might prompt the opening of secret compartments usually kept closed (*World in a Box*, 2003). As the drawers of compartments were opened the correspondences were changed, new constellations created.

Patrick Mauries refers to the cabinet of curiosity as the 'theatre of the world' (Mauries, 2002). These acts of revealing and concealing objects were only part of the cabinet's performance. The oral exposition plays an integral part to this cabinet theatre. Stephen Bann draws direct comparisons between the abbot using his white rod to guide the pilgrim through the reliquary display and John Bargrave and his cabinet (Bann, 1995, p. 28). "We can imagine his little theatre being set up before its audience, and Bargrave launching into an animated description that would simultaneously tell the story of an object's acquisition and venture into speculations on its scientific origins..." (Bann, 1995, p. 28). The collector demonstrator could make the meaning or significance of the curiosity object, which could be unreadable in its singularity, clear to the viewer. They could make the relationship between objects clear; make the collection into some sort of coherence. Objects were things to tell stories with; to explain the world with, giving it the appearance of coherence; or to expose coherence in the world that they felt pre-existed in the world.

The display of relics and curiosity requires these forms of exposition because they were ciphers without, necessarily, having obvious visible meaning. In both cases, an intermediary was required to allow the majority of viewers to read the objects; and they were objects which could be read because they were perceived to carry so many narratives. The rhetoric of their display allowed these stories to be told because it is a rhetoric which narrates its objects to its viewers. In this way, the object was deciphered for the viewer; its hidden meanings were spoken for it through display. Overtly narrative-laden objects like Becket's relics or Henry VIII's

hawking gloves require narrative display methods but, more than that, they are compatible with these methods: narrative objects displayed narratively.

Specimen Display and the Rhetoric of Facts: How Shifts in the Natural Sciences have Changed Object Display

This section considers the starkly contrasting display rhetoric which emerged in the public museums of the nineteenth century. The public museums of the nineteenth century emerged from a different collecting practice than the curiosity cabinets. The previous century had radically altered the way that objects were interpreted and therefore displayed. The ideas and systems of the burgeoning natural sciences shaped ways of looking at the world and reframed the reading of all displayed objects, whether natural object or artefact.³ In order to understand this kind of object display, it is necessary to examine some of the natural science display practices that construct and privilege the type specimen.

These new museums functioned to educate the public in the new science rather than entice with wonders and allegorical objects. It is these developments in display practice which make the existence of biographical objects and their display in need of explanation. How can the century which brought such ideologically different museums into being also be the originator for the biographical museum? During this period the overtly narrative object, like the biographical object, was either systematised in large public collections or marginalised by either being left to the auspices of popular entertainments or existing only in the private collections of enthusiasts.

By the nineteenth century, the objects which had been in the curiosity cabinets had been translated into new museums. The Tradescant collection, which had been subsumed in the Ashmolean Museum in Oxford, had been reorganised, divided into different sorts of objects with the plant collection, separated from the medals; the animals from the manmade objects. The purpose of displayed objects had changed from being ciphers and tellers of stories to being examples and being of 'benefit and use' (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992, p. 148). In the new public museums, the object was regarded as a specimen: an object selected or regarded as typical of its class; a part or piece of something taken as representative of the whole. The type specimen was the ultimate example of its species. The type specimen is the example which best describes the species and to which all other examples are compared. These techniques were translated into the display of objects from outside the natural sciences.

If the Renaissance episteme (as defined by Foucault and applied to museums by Hooper-Greenhill) was based upon knowing through similitude and correspondences between objects in the collections, then the classical episteme was based upon knowing through discrimination

³ I use the word artefact to differentiate between the natural history specimen and the object which is made meaningful through either human manufacture or cultural signification.

between objects. “Resemblance, which had for long been the fundamental category of knowing...became disassociated in an analysis based on terms of identity and difference...comparison became a function of order...” (Foucault, 2002, p. 60). The endless mysterious webs of connections between things were unravelled by a process of identifying and differentiating. Similitude, which had been the guiding mode of knowledge, was turned into a sign of error (Foucault, 2002, p. 56). Enlightened collectors of naturalia who considered themselves scientific in their processes could use systematic observation and experiment to clearly identify their specimens. Natural philosophers sought to know the world by classifying it. They did this by discriminating between difference creatures and objects in order to arrange them into ‘families’, taxonomies.

In her essay, “A Mammoth History” (2007), Taika Dahlbom investigates the history of two bones from the Royal Danish *Kunstkammer*. She describes the representational journey that the two bones went on, from first being displayed in the *Kunstkammer* into the nineteenth century. They moved from being displayed and described as the bones of giants, as curiosities, to being re-classified as the bones of elephants by 1824 to finally being identified as mammoth bones by the late nineteenth century. This object journey (or biography) shows the ways that objects were re-categorised under the gaze of the classical episteme and how the previously singular object into one typical of a wider phenomenon: in this instance changing the curiosity to the specimen. It is typical of how naturalists identified and generally demystified curious objects - with an

...ordered tabulation of knowledge, where identity and difference interacted with the observation, measurement, and comparison of visible features. The legends and fables of the past were cut away as a separation was made between documentation, fable and observation. (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992, p. 158)

Natural philosophers of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries used their new methodologies to classify objects into systematic taxonomies. For example, Georges Cuvier (1769-1832), the French naturalist who would take a fossilized bone, closely and systematically examine it, compare it to other bones, including those of living species, then extrapolate from the comparative information the likely form of the creature that once owned the bone: back-telling from the bone to the original animal, based on close observation of similar animals. Once the identification is made, the object is legible.

Classification was a means of making the world into an ordered sequence. The most influential and revolutionary taxonomic system, though not the only one to emerge from the eighteenth century, was created by Carl Linnaeus. He created a “good taxonomic toolbox” (Asma, 2003, p. 118). He broke a plant down into 31 sexual characteristics that could be analysed by criteria of shape, position, proportion and number. From this the plant could be assigned to an order, a genus and a species (Asma, 2003, p. 118). Linnaeus had created a universal system that collectors could follow, lessening the confusion that had previously existed between collections that had multiple organisational systems and languages of interpretation. All objects might be broken down into types by applying indicative criteria. His

system was applied to fauna, though this led to some oddities in classification, drawing criticism from other 'expert' natural philosophers. Despite this, Linnaean taxonomy still became the foundation for today's taxonomies.

For those accustomed to this framework, which identified and discriminated, the systems of organisation in the cabinets appeared eclectic and chaotic. Though some curiosity cabinets found their way into public museums, it would be simplistic to assume that the cabinet became the nineteenth-century museum. The eighteenth-century collections of men, such as Hans Sloane or the Royal Society's Repository, were not dominated by singularities but followed Bacon's principles of usefulness (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992, p. 148). The new systems transformed collections such as the former Tradescant collection which had become the foundation of the Ashmolean Museum and which was completely overhauled in the 1820's into a new system of arrangement (Barber, 1980, p. 152). "Nineteenth-century advocates of scientific approaches to museum exhibition complained repeatedly about collections of curiosities that were displayed without systematic arrangement" (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 1998, p. 25). In the public museums of the mid to late nineteenth century, objects were no longer displayed in order to tell stories. The displayed object was a specimen and was required to convey information. The specimen was supposed to be a representative of objective fact. The object as classified fact swept away the excessive narrativity present in relics and curiosities. It gave information preference over narrative. In order to educate or instruct their visitors, the public museums needed to accurately convey the world as science saw it at the time, not to mislead the visitor with extraneous narratives.

Adopting Stephen Conn's analogy, from his 1998 book *Museums and American Intellectual Life*, the nineteenth-century museum was an architectural and organisational Gradgrind,⁴ rooting out the idiosyncratic and subjective way of responding to objects and planting scientific fact in its place (Conn, 1998, p. 32). As Charles Dickens has Gradgrind say at the beginning of his novel *Hard Times* (1854): "Now, what I want is, Facts. Teach boys and girls nothing but Facts. Facts alone are wanted in life. Plant nothing else, and root out everything else" (Dickens, 1854). Thomas Gradgrind is the character most associated with *Hard Times* which was a satire on utilitarian and positivist philosophies: the one rejecting anything that was not useful and the other rejecting anything that could not be proven scientifically or mathematically. Conn uses the scene at the beginning of the novel where Gradgrind asks 'girl number 20' (Sissy Jupe) to define a horse. This she is unable to do to his satisfaction as she does not possess the required facts and because she answers with what he considers extraneous details unrelated to basic facts. "In Gradgrind's eyes – and... in the eyes of most nineteenth century scientists... - a horse is simply the sum of the observable facts: quadruped, hard hooves, etc." (Conn, 1998, p. 33). In this way, he asserts, the nineteenth-century natural sciences made a fetish of the observable fact. If the world, and therefore its objects, could be

⁴ Gradgrind has become a popular analogy for utilitarian and positivist philosophies

reduced to a series of observable facts, then there could be no room for objects with hidden meaning or for subjective interpretation: for the fancies which Gradgrind and his business associate Bounderby dismiss 'Girl 20' for having.

According to this framework, an observer should stand back from perceptions and beliefs, and subject the world to unbiased scrutiny and judgement which would provide an accurate representation of the world and the reception of facts. "To be objective is to aspire to knowledge that bears no trace of the knower – knowledge unmarked by prejudice or skill, fantasy or judgement, wishing or striving. Objectivity is blind sight, seeing without inference, interpretation, or intelligence" (Daston and Galison, 2010, p. 17). An accurate representation to the world was precisely what the nineteenth-century public museum required and objectivity is what the museum tried to instil in its visitors: another aspect of their instruction. The museums would come to be trusted as truth-tellers, with the authority of the science that lay behind their displays. This was the authority of the teacher over its pupils. It was considered to be superior to the popular entertainments from impresarios like Tussaud, Bullock and Barnum.

This authority communicated the notion that the world could be fixed and orderly and that the new science had provided this. The collection of displayed objects could provide the reference book from which anyone could examine the world within the confine of four walls.

Museum builders tried to faithfully reconstruct the world as they understood it inside their institutions, and in doing so they reinforced the truths that they tried to represent...The ideas, represented through objects on display, became true by virtue of their being in a museum. At the same time, these museums drew authority by representing with the power of objects a coherent worldview that, at least for some and at least for a while, worked to create intellectual order. (Conn, 1998, p. 253)

It had the authority of science behind it and the public could be usefully instructed about the true nature of the world through systematically displayed objects arranged by objective specialists in their field.

Once the constituent parts of the world were observed, then they could be subjected to taxonomic classification. Once classified, natural scientists could create systematic collections of representative species (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992, p. 156). The systematic classification of objects in natural sciences translated into the museum in systematic display. Natural science specimens could be arranged into taxonomic series.⁵ Their display could show the secrets of the world the scientists had unlocked through systematic and objective observation.

In practice, the systematic series display resulted in glass fronted or topped wooden cabinets with specimens arranged in regimented series, what Kirschenblatt-Gimblett has described as in-context displays (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 1998). Rows and rows of similar objects (which had subtle differences) laid in a progressive series according to their taxonomic

⁵ For images of nineteenth-century displays in the Natural History Museum, London see, <http://picilib.nhm.ac.uk/searchresults.asp?cat=MUS%2008>

system. The result is a museum as a material encyclopaedia or an inventory of the world. The series display was supposed to present information with clarity and accuracy. Object by object, the known world was laid before the viewer like the pages of an encyclopaedia: these were object lessons, and display cases could be read like textbooks in a library (Forgan, 1994, p. 148; Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 1998, p. 31). These material lists bear no resemblance to the allegories of the medieval cathedral or the correspondences of the cabinet: they do not create stories. They are like statements of fact, information without elaboration, ambiguity of meaning or 'fancy'. Their lack of ambiguity was thought to enable clarity of meaning.

In the natural science museum, the object was a material fact, a source of knowledge, which even the untrained visitor could read if they observed correctly. This object-based epistemology meant that "knowledge could be obtained by anyone who visited the museum and studied the objects, provided the museum curators arranged the displays systematically." (Conn, 1998, p. 21). The objects are made legible by their arrangement and there was a belief that objects were sources of knowledge and meaning. Though the objects were still removed from their original context as they had been in the curiosity cabinets, they find new context within the classificatory framework, making them clearly legible. This meant that the visitor did not need extensive narrative exposition of the objects and could interpret them themselves without recourse to wild tales, as in the cabinets.

In essence, for these early museum builders, objects should be able to speak for themselves through systematic arrangement using scientific principles as laid out by Bacon, Linnaeus et al. This idea was reiterated by a nineteenth-century museum director Edward Everett Ayer: "All museum material should speak for itself upon sight. It should be an open book which tells a better story than any description will do." (Conn, 1998, p. 4). The scientific arrangement of objects sought for clarity and unmediated communication of the object's meaning unencumbered by illegibility and the need for narrative exposition which persisted in the display of curiosities and to collections such as those of the Tradescants.

For the museums to have the authority to state that their displays accurately represent the world, they needed those facts to be indisputable. Facts should be things that were known or proved to be true, they should speak for themselves. They were required to be unambiguous and unmediated. In that way they were capable of giving an impression of certainty and truth. There are two problems with this idea: fixity and mediation. The problem with the idea of fixity is that as the nineteenth century progressed, science began to undermine this notion of the fixed fact with new theories coming from the new fields of geology and palaeontology but most especially from Darwin's theories of natural selection. His ideas about the importance of variation as the means of species adaptation in the natural world that heavily impacted on any notion that the world could be recorded in a fixed and understandable form. More than that, it gave renewed importance to the anomalous. Mediation was also a problem. In the narrative rhetoric, meaning was always mediated. The factual rhetoric required facts to be unambiguous, unmediated, and without bias of the authorship.

The problem is that facts cannot speak for themselves; and therefore neither can material facts. In his book, *We Have Never Been Modern* (1993), sociologist and anthropologist Bruno Latour examines scientific method and knowledge production, investigating the division that has opened between nature and culture. He compares the methods of philosopher Thomas Hobbes and scientist Robert Boyle, both of whom he views as still having influence on scientific and political method. The former arrived at his results through calculation, mathematical demonstration, without what he viewed as the deception of the human senses; the latter an experimenter, and observer, who would use witnesses to his experiments to verify the existence of a fact, a theatre of proof (Latour, 1993, p. 18). These were "...inert bodies, incapable of will and bias but capable of showing, signing writing, and scribbling on laboratory instruments before trustworthy witnesses." (Latour, 1993, p. 23). Science sought to produce verifiable facts, free from human bias, or one might say authorship. These then are the facts that Gradgrind so venerates.

However, Latour moves on to question not the possibility of fact but the possibility of communicating those facts without that same human bias.

In themselves, facts are mute...Yet the scientists declare that they themselves are not speaking; rather facts speak for themselves. These mute entities are thus capable of speaking, writing, signifying within the artificial chamber of the laboratory...an object that is mute but endowed or entrusted with meaning. (Latour, 1993, p. 29)

The fact cannot speak for itself; it is reliant upon the scientist's "invisible mediation". In which case, the fact is not free from mediation, interpretation; it remains a representation. The scientist becomes the fact's witness and its spokesman; more than that the scientist becomes the fact's ventriloquist.

What then of the rhetoric of fact within the Gradgrind museum? If objects stand for facts, they should adhere to the same criteria and the same problems are present. The objects cannot speak for themselves, they too are mute. The scientist speaks for the fact, and so the curator speaks for the object: "...the curator was a ventriloquist whose task it was to make the object speak." (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 1998, p. 35). Consequently, the object-based epistemology that the early museum directors sought, where objects could speak for themselves if arranged systematically, was an illusion. The display of these objects could still be illegible, in need of extensive exposition: exactly what the museum builders had hoped to mitigate against.

The final irony perhaps is that the type specimen, which was supposed to represent the most typical, actually became singular. When looking for the type specimen, Daston says that

Specimens which bear the name in [the collector's] handwriting should be given preference in the selection, and of these the type is...the one collected by the person for whom the species is named...The biographies of type-specimens had become as important as those of their authors to botanist's intent on nailing a name to a species. (Daston, 2004, p. 175)

In this way, certain specimens were considered significant for their uniqueness rather than being subsumed in value within the series display. Objectivity is overtaken by collector or classifier's specificity.⁶

So influential was this rhetoric that the new systematised display was applied outside the natural sciences; and it is this application which firstly explains the need to describe the practices of natural history display and secondly will show how the rhetoric of fact is problematic when applied to the associative objects of this research. A good example of the application of natural science display to other disciplines comes from the work of Augustus Pitt-Rivers (1827-1900). Inspired by Darwin's theories, Pitt-Rivers set about formulating a cultural evolutionary sequence for his vast collection of artefacts comprising archaeological and anthropological objects.

[his collection] concentrated on series of objects from all over the world, grouped according to function and divided into small exhibition groups with the aim of suggesting an evolutionary progression, by placing those forms classified as more 'natural' and organic at the beginning of the series culminating in more 'complex' and specialised forms (Coombes, 1988, p. 61)

He claimed to have been the first to apply typology to anthropology or archaeology though this has been disputed (AP, 2010). There was much debate around the best way to display ethnographic material, whether typologically or geographically (Coombes, 1988, p. 60). Pitt-Rivers' typological system grouped ethnographical or archaeological materials according to their form or their functional similarities, rather than according to their place of origin, or chronologically. Pitt-Rivers said that, "In an educational museum, specimens should be selected that are useful in displaying sequence. These should be arranged so as to show how one form has led to another" (AP, 2010). He was using a basic Darwinian sequence from simple to complex and therefore applying the methodologies from the natural sciences to artefacts. He saw "the problems of the naturalist and those of the typologist are analogous" (AP, 2010). He believed that typologies allowed even the most alien of artefact to fit in to a wider understanding of the world, which would be easily digested by the museum visitor.

Although Pitt-Rivers had applied his rigorous typology to his collection, the application of scientific methodologies to man-made objects was problematic. Artefacts do not behave in the same way as specimens; they are expected to do more. The objects of non-Western peoples, which were increasingly collected by people like Pitt-Rivers, were not simple facts to be systematically arranged. His typology extracted the object from its context and entirely reframed it into a system unrelated to its context of use. Twenty examples of knives from multiple periods and multiple locations might enable comparison but can tell the visitor nothing of the culture from which it came. By extracting an object and inserting it into a sequence

⁶ For example, evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins, who illustrated what he was saying with a selection of finch specimens. He picked up and rejected finches until he found one specifically collected by Darwin. Despite being a scientist who is famous for his atheism and condemnation of superstitious thinking, he showed preference based on the name of the specimen's collector (*The Genius of Charles Darwin*, 2008).

based on form or function, the meaning of the object is lost. One cannot simply reduce an artefact to a single fact as the Natural Scientists have done with natural objects. A horse is a horse by virtue of specific facts that make up its horsiness – quadruped etc. To return to the Tradescant objects, the Henry VIII objects for example might still be together as being functionally related by hawking. The glove can be fitted with a collection of other gloves to show the evolution of the glove from simple to more complex. They could also be curated with other chronologically associated objects. Each arrangement enables partial information, and none of them speak of Henry VIII, his habits, physique, life and what he represents. It is exceptionally difficult to define an object made meaningful by human activity in similar terms to the scientific specimen without making its meaning partial or fragmentary.

Another museum curator from a generation later, the anthropologist Franz Boas (1858-1942), stood in direct opposition to Pitt-Rivers. Writing in a 1907 article for the journal *Science*, he describes his principles of museum administration, which includes curation. He is critical of the attempts his predecessors made to systematize anthropological collections.

Thus it happens that any array of objects is always only an exceedingly fragmentary presentation of the true life of people. For this reason, any attempt to present ethnological data by a systematic classification of specimens will not only be artificial, but will be entirely misleading. (Boas, 1907, p. 928)

If, as Boas, says the artefact is fragmentary, then it cannot be an unambiguous object of fact. It cannot fulfil the requirements of the Gradgrind museum; nothing but facts, which speak for themselves.

The artefact, made meaningful by human activity, is the locus of multiple points of signification which, if simplified down to one particular, loses purpose; not only to the originating culture but to the museum seeking to describe that culture through its objects. The artefact struggles, if inserted into a simple list form of display, to describe its meaning. One way of describing this difference between the artefact laden with signification and one whose meaning is simplified down to one particular can be the difference between the thick and the thin description. American anthropologist Clifford Geertz describes both thin and thick description in his book, *The Interpretation of Culture* (Geertz, 1973). Thin description means that the anthropological description skims the surface of a culture. Thick description of a cultural behaviour not only explains it but gives it context; such that the behaviour becomes meaningful to an outsider.

The concept of culture I espouse ... is essentially a semiotic one. Believing, with Max Weber, that man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun, I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of a law but an interpretive one in search of meaning. (Geertz, 1973, p. 5)

The artefact in the Gradgrind series was incomplete, based upon what might be described as thin description. To allow more than fragmentary meaning, the display is required to give more of the context and significance required by thick description.

To extend the Dickensian analogy of nineteenth-century museums, Gradgrind sought nothing but facts, the result of which was a thin description. However, for a thick description one should look to the target of his indignation. Sissy Jupe could not describe a horse in the way he required because her replies to his questions were not concise. Sissy narrates (contextualises) her answers.

...'What is your father?'

'He belongs to the horse-riding, if you please, sir.'

'We don't want to know anything about that, here. You mustn't tell us about that, here. Your father breaks horses, don't he?'

'If you please, sir, when they can get any to break, they do break horses in the ring, sir.'

'You mustn't tell us about the ring, here. Very well, then. Describe your father as a horse-breaker, He doctors sick horses, I dare say?'

'Oh yes, sir.'

'Very well, then. He is a veterinary surgeon, a farrier, and a horse-breaker.... (Dickens, 1854, p. 3)

In her description there is too much extraneous information for Gradgrind. Throughout this chapter of *Hard Times*, which introduces the reader to the primary characters, Sissy Jupe's elaboration causes him indignation.⁷ Sissy Jupe represents narrative, elaboration, ornamentation of objects and phenomena: the thick description. A horse isn't just a quadruped, gaminivorous, hard hoofs, etc; it is connected to her life in the circus, her family, the activities of the circus. A horse is something she views in context of the culture in which she lives.

The factual display rhetoric, with its regimented rows of classified specimens, seems to have only been the dominant mode for a few decades. There are many possible reasons for this, ranging from shifts in the sciences on which the technique was based, to the problems with material facts speaking for themselves. The object in a display is always a representative and therefore in need of an interpreter. Although an attempt was made to get away from the authored displays of the curiosity cabinets into something more objective, the results were mixed; the ventriloquised object being unable to stand alone and speak for itself.

Further, although the cabinets with their holistic display approach had easily accommodated cultural artefacts into its collections, they presented more of a problem for the more rigid systematic displays. Their companions in the cabinets, the natural history specimen, were more easily suited to this form of display. Objects which owe their signification to human activity cannot neatly slot into a material list in the museum encyclopaedia. Culture inscribes its objects and they require thick descriptions to understand them. This limits the Gradgrind-ery of the museum. Associative objects present the museum taxonomist as

⁷ In response to a question about whether one should have wallpaper covered in horses and carpets covered in flowers, to which the answer is expected to be no because it does not reflect reality, Sissy Jupe says she would fancy wallpaper covered in horses, or flower covered carpets; she's fond of flowers, it would be very pleasant and pretty (Dickens, 1854, p. 6).

anomalies, which are either marginalised or artificially inserted into a more simplistic series; this marginalisation will be discussed further in the next section.

A Return to Narrative and Tension in the Museum: How Object Display Returned to an Earlier Display Rhetoric.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, public museum display seems to begin to change. The message the museums were conveying remained essentially the same – information and systematically derived facts. However, the rhetoric of display began to move away from the strictly regimented rows of specimens with minimal labelling to the use of diorama and period room to re-contextualise the abstracted object. This return to the context of the object in effect reflects the modern episteme which had arrived late into the museum display (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992, p. 199). “During the classical age, a thing became an object through its visible features. Now material things present themselves in their relation to human beings.” (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992, p. 204). I will argue that this presents a partial return, or equivalent, to the earlier display rhetoric. This meant that the two modes of display and interpretation had to coexist. This coexistence of factual and narrative rhetoric, because the former was in part a reaction to the latter, created a tension in museum curation: a tension between listed fact and evocative associations, between accurate representation and narrative description. It is a similar tension to that which still exists in museums that display overtly narrative objects like the biographical object.

The displayed object was excised from its context (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 1998, p. 18). For the early public museum administrators this was a virtue rather than a problem. “Removing objects from their pre-existing worlds of use and arranging them in a designated space allowed meaning and order to be discerned in the unruly and teeming world of things” (MacDonald, 2011, p. 85). However, as we have seen, the material fact was fragmentary in its meaning, something made worse by its removal of context. The artefact is particularly vulnerable to this fragmentation; it detaches it from its inherent meaning. The fragment being partial, or an excerpt, becomes like a cipher. It requires explanation. The artefact, then, might require all the narrative exposition that the ‘scientific museum’ sought to remove. It cannot speak for itself.

However, by the early twentieth century contextual association became more important which rescues the artefact from total representational fragmentation. This shift is clear in an argumentative exchange from 1924 between painter Charles Sheeler (1883-1965) and museum builder Henry Mercer (1856-1930) over a door latch (Conn, 1998, p. 246). Mercer used systematic scientific methods in his museum and saw context stripping as necessary for correct specimen appreciation. Removing an object from its context meant that it could be properly appreciated without ‘unscientific’ distractions (Conn, 1998, p. 246). For Sheeler the

piece had value because of the context in which it was situated. Far from being a distraction for Sheeler's generation, context gave meaning to an object and perhaps better enabled understanding by preventing or compensating for the sense of the object's fragmentation.

The fragmentary object could be reconstituted through display by returning its context, or something approximating its context, making the fragment whole again. The diorama and period room re-contextualised the specimen from the series to a recreation of its associated context. Retaining objects in their original context was not always possible, though it did occur. This was especially true of the natural history specimen: the bones could not be returned to the animal, and the animal could not be revived. However, they could be re-contextualised through different forms of curation and taxidermy. A natural history diorama re-contextualised the specimen from the series to a recreation of its associated context. Dioramas had begun to appear in public museums towards the end of the nineteenth century. They included natural history displays, which might consist of either a 'family' or geographical group of taxidermied specimens, curated with a painted background, and interspersed with associated flora of the area. The example most often cited, by writers such as Donna Haraway, is the African Hall in the American Museum of Natural History in New York (Haraway, 1984). In the 1930s, it installed 'habitat halls' in a bid to make the specimens appear more 'natural'.

This diorama technique was applied to artefacts, grouping artefacts by contextual association and presenting them in ways that implied their uses: re-contextualising objects by grouping them by contextual association. Today, period rooms can be seen in virtually every National Trust property in the United Kingdom as well as the majority of biographical museums. They return the objects to the appearance of their former use. This was further extended to include large-scale recreations of entire locations in order to frame the objects in context. Outdoor museums, such as Skansen in Sweden (1891) and the Henry Ford Museum in the US (1930), framed entire buildings and their contents as museum displays (Sandberg, 2003) in what could be compared to diorama and period room. In each of these forms the objects are 'rescued' from their fragmentary status by being reconstituted by display, partially compensating for the abstraction from their original context. The diorama imitates the former context of the objects they display; or rather, they have a mimetic relationship with the real world. In this way, they stage the world as if real.

As part of her study of ethnographic display, Barbara Kirschenblatt-Gimblett describes two forms of display. The first, "in-context display",⁸ refers to the series displays discussed in the previous section. The second form of display she terms "in-situ" display, which equate to the dioramas and period rooms. "In-situ" display is based on metonymy and mimesis. This is why the fragment fits better in this form of display, as metonymy "accepts the fragmentary nature of the object" (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 1998, p. 19). Metonymy reconstitutes the objects by

⁸ Her use of the term context is different to the ways in which it has been used in this text; for her the context in series displays is created by the classificatory framework, the display furniture and the use of labels etc. (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 1998, p. 19)

referring to its whole, and mimesis further reconstitutes it by completing the object's absent context. "In-situ approaches to installation enlarge the ethnographic object by expanding its boundaries to include more of what was left behind, even if only in replica, after the object was excised from its physical, social, and cultural settings" (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 1998, p. 20). Franz Boas had criticised the systematic display of classificatory series for its artificial and misleading display of ethnographic data because any display was a fragmentary presentation of a people. The diorama was a means of presenting a less fragmentary presentation.

In the 1930s, a public opinion survey carried out by the Pennsylvania Museum "...seemed to demonstrate overwhelmingly that the public preferred ... Period rooms to well-ordered and visually neutral galleries..." (Conn, 1998, p. 229). However, the inclusion of diorama and period room was not without its problems for the public museums. The period room and the diorama may reconstitute the fragmentary specimen but its recreation of context is, in essence, artifice. The diorama and period room imitate the former context of the objects they display; they have a mimetic relationship with the real world. They stage the world as if real, but this presents a problem to the museum which also seeks accurate representation and 'nothing but facts'. In the diorama only certain of the objects were 'real' with the remaining being stage set. This mixture of the material fact and some artifice to complete the fragment has shades of seventeenth-century display practice. At this point the completion of the encyclopaedia of sculpture, for example, meant that fragmentary classical statues were completed and others fabricated to complete the series; not until the eighteenth century did the concept of authenticity override the value of the complete series (Hooper-Greenhill, 1992, p. 142). However, by the nineteenth century the notion of the real and the false was firmly established, and therefore could trouble the factual rhetoric of the museum. Nevertheless, it should be noted that displays such as Akeley's African halls were highly accurate in their representation which allowed some sense of objective science being adhered to in their creation.

The 'accurate representation' that the museums were built on, required the interpreter (visitor) to approach the displayed objects with the detached eye of the scientific mind. The new display methods could allow such a detached gaze but could also allow the exhibited specimen to become part of a spectacle.

... mimetic displays may be so dazzling in their realistic effects as to subvert curatorial efforts to focus the viewer's attention on particular ideas or objects. There is the danger that theatrical spectacle will displace scientific seriousness, that the artifice of the installation will overwhelm ethnographic artefact and curatorial intention. (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 1998, p. 21)

This was the second troublesome aspect of these contextualising displays, the possibility that the audience would not read the objects in the way the curators wished, not learning from them but rather being entertained by them; something which would make them closer to popular entertainments: like the Egyptian Hall and Madame Tussaud's. The century that saw the greatest ever period of museum building was also the century that saw a boom in exhibitions as popular entertainment. Curiosity had not just been taxonomised in the museum,

it had also been translated into popular entertainments like freak shows, world's fairs and, in America, Dime museums.⁹ These commercial operations were considered sensationalist, prone to fraud, and to put profit before authenticity and learning. Two such entertainments, the Egyptian Hall and the Pantheon, were owned by William Bullock (1773 – 1849). He had a showman background and these exhibitions were designed to make him money, and perhaps because of this, he was viewed as the antithesis of what the later museums were set up to do.¹⁰ He regularly employed the “in-situ” display (Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 1998). As early as 1812, Bullock was arranging natural history specimens with simulations of their natural habitats emphasising “the relationship of the natural groups to their environments”, for example a recreation of Mexico showing art, houses, flora and fauna (Pearce, 2008, pp. 17-23). However, he did not view his exhibits as mere entertainment and when he applied similar approaches to ethnographic objects, he did so in order to “create a genuinely serious and educational demonstration of a particular way of life” (Pearce, 2008, p. 21).

Whether in the museum or the Egyptian hall, there was a probability that the response elicited from the visitor could be individualised and based in the imagination (subjective), which for the museum presented a problem. They were there to encourage an objective reading of the scientific knowledge. The subjective self was thought at that period to be “prone to prettify and idealize” (Daston and Galison, 2010, p. 34) just like Sissy Jupe. By ornamenting or elaborating on the ‘facts’ she individualised her experience of the world, something which did not fit Gradgrind’s positivist utilitarian view. The diorama and period room likewise elaborated upon the specimens they contained, in order to contextualise them, bringing them closer to points in a narrative than to entries in an encyclopaedia.

I argue that the use of dioramas and period rooms is a return to the earlier narrative display rhetoric. Objects in the museums of the early twentieth century had the potential for similar issues of illegibility as the relic or curiosity because they were also fragmentary things whose fragmentation was exacerbated by their removal from context. The ways in which their abstraction and fragmentation is compensated for and their illegibility is deciphered are, at least analogously, where the return to earlier modes of display is made apparent. It is possible to describe three phases in display rhetoric which loosely follow Hooper-Greenhill’s analysis of museum display. The first is the narrative display rhetoric of the curiosity and the relic; the second is the factual rhetoric of the specimen and series display; the third is a museum display rhetoric which lies at the intersection of the two, a partial return to the earlier.

This return to the narrative rhetoric is manifested firstly in the ways in which the object’s significance is narratively built, and secondly in forms of narrative exposition. Firstly, the

⁹ For closer examination of these phenomena, see Cook, J., 2001. *Art of Deception: Playing with Fraud in the Age of Barnum*; Goodman, D., 1990. *Fear of Circuses: Founding the National Museum of Victoria*; Kirschenblatt-Gimblett, 1998. *Destination Culture: Tourism, Museums, and Heritage*; Maxwell, A., 2000. *Colonial Photography and Exhibitions: Representations of the Native and the Making of European Identities*.

¹⁰ Although it been argued that exhibitions like Bullock’s did seek to be educational and serious, and that his contribution to interpretation of objects has been underrated (Pearce, 2008)

artefact's meaning is narratively constructed through its provenance or what has been called object biography (Kopytoff, 1986), which is analogous to the narratives which made the relic and the curiosity meaningful, being the summation of what had happened to them up until the present: the hands through which the object has passed and the locations it has been held. The Casement artefacts, for example, described by McDiarmid and referred to in the introduction, are narratively built through the hands that they passed through, letters describing their use, and the life of Roger Casement (McDiarmid, 2002). The artefact is an object through which an individual or a society's stories can be told. However, as has been argued they are not objects that can speak for themselves and, because the artefacts have a cultural value beyond their basic function, they require more explanation than merely a visual inspection.

The second manifestation of the return to the narrative rhetoric is shown in narrative exposition. The three forms of exposition discussed in the first section of this chapter (oral, textual and visual) can be seen in the period room or diorama in twentieth-century museums. Considered in this way these display methods show a return to the earlier rhetoric. All three are antithetical to the unmediated objective display for which the nineteenth-century public museum strove. However, in the third phase, objects again became tools to tell stories with rather than the objects as facts in a material encyclopaedia.

Oral exposition takes the form of tour guides and later in the century audio-visual guides which explained the object and collection narratives for the visitor. The object meaning is mediated through a guide just as it was in the cathedral or cabinet. The guide, rather than pointing at jewels adorning a reliquary (Bann, 1995, p. 29), pointed out different objects in the diorama and explained their significance to the visitor. In the Elgar Birthplace, for example, the visitor is prompted to select tracks from the audio guide at each cabinet which then describes the object, its significance in Elgar's life, whilst having one of its works playing in the background.

Textual exposition has never really left object display but the simplicity of labels naming the object has been supplemented by explanatory labels, interpretation boards and guide books. In recent years this has been augmented by the use of internet sites and social media. The objects are highly mediated through the texts that accompany them. The guidebook specifically tells stories through the objects. The National Trust use period rooms extensively to show their objects and the guide book contextualises the objects in relation to the rooms in which they are displayed. This enables a continuing reading of object even after the visit. For example, the guide to Benjamin Disraeli's house, Hughendon, lists the rooms and their content with descriptions or stories of their use, allowing the visitor to associate specific narratives to specific objects or rooms (National Trust, 1997).

Visual exposition, in the nature of the reliquary or curiosity cabinet, is less obviously analogous. The imagery, which decorated the reliquary and told the story of the relic and its

discovery, is not immediately comparable to the diorama displays. However, they perform precisely the same function. Both the reliquary and the diorama visually explain or narrate their objects. The visual exposition of the relic consisted of representations of the object's narrative integrated into the object's medium of display, whether painted or sculptural. These representations gave the relic context and explained the hidden object to the viewer. Similarly, the curiosity was visually narrated by the design of its cabinet, its meaning being drawn out in the constellations of correspondences created by the display. The object in the diorama display is narrated and explained in similar ways, also being anomalous without some mediation. Re-contextualisation through display allowed objects to be visually narrated.

An example from biographical museum practice should clarify the comparison. The image in Figure 8 shows the Down House reconstruction of Darwin's study.¹¹ In essence, it is a period room showing historically contiguous objects. Re-contextualised displays like this, and many others, are the equivalent of the roundels of a reliquary like the Stavelot triptych or the speaking reliquaries in an associated shape. Visual clues around the object narrate their meaning or allow them to tell their stories. The triptych's panel, which visually narrated the discovery and collection of the true cross and therefore narrated the reliquary's contents, is translated into the diorama. In the Darwin 'habitat', his chair is allowed beyond its basic function as a chair to tell visually the story of its use by its position in relation to the features of the room, fireplace window etc.; the cluttered table and carefully positioned stool narrate the chair's use. Each object's story is narrated through the engagement it has with the objects



Figure 7 - Study reconstruction - Down House – Image © Guardian News and Media

¹¹ See also the reconstruction of the study for The Natural History Museum "Darwin's Big Idea" exhibition. www.theguardian.com/science/gallery/2008/nov/14/charles-darwin-big-idea-exhibition

around it and with its location. In isolation, the objects cannot convey their full meaning but in mimetic context they enable the possibility of a coherent representation. The relations between objects show the narratives which are the equivalent to the relic's provenance; they contribute to the communication of the object's significance. The mimetic display performs as the displays of the cathedral: creating an image of an absent world.

Curation in the period room is a partial return to the rhetoric of the cabinets as well. This form of display allows for, even encourages, correspondences between objects as the curiosity cabinet did. The viewer's eye, rather than being strictly guided through a series of facts in specific order, can trace its own path around the period room. Visitors are encouraged to gain knowledge, not through comparison and differentiation as in the series display, but through similitude because the display is based upon mimesis. They are encouraged to make multiple connections, and narratives. The object in this context resembles the curiosity, the object returns to being what Bann terms a "...nexus of interrelated meanings..." (Bann, 2003, p. 120); and although the multiplicity of different meanings could add to the objects illegibility, it encourages narrativity by allowing viewers to formulate their own correspondences, which in the display of contiguous objects relate to one specific person.

The Tension: How the Biographical Object is a Problem to the Museum

The tension of this section's title relates to this intersection in a Venn diagram of object display; between the narrative and the factual rhetoric, between Sissy Jupe and Gradgrind. Even if what is being communicated is based on 'scientifically' derived facts, the use of reconstruction adds an element of ambiguity. The tension occurs because the museum wants but cannot successfully fulfil its own requirement for the conveyance of truth (fact) and accurate representation without mediation, some illusions, and the elaboration of narrative. The display of biographical objects, in particular, troubles the modern museum. Perhaps, beyond other museum objects, they are the true remnants of the older forms of objects. Like the more general museum, the biographical museum wishes to convey the facts about their subject through objects, but the biographical object is often highly ambiguous and completely illegible without the clear exposition of the museum. In some museums, this leaves such objects side-lined or disassociated from other possible singularities.

The primary cause, I would argue, of this tension is the relationship between the meaning that the object is required to convey and the mode of display, or rhetoric. In Section One, the mode of display reflected the meaning the objects are perceived to carry; in other words, narrative objects were displayed in a narrative manner in order to allow them to speak. An example would be the glove of Edward the Confessor which carried multiple narratives which were drawn from it using narrative exposition. Similarly, in Section Two the mode and the meaning reflected each other; information conveyed through material facts that were

displayed in a factual manner which allowed “Nothing but Facts!” without distraction. An example would be a collection of beetles, displayed in series, which allow visible differentiation and comparison. The difference between a novel and an encyclopaedia might be an analogy. At the intersection of the two, the meaning does not reflect the mode of display. This can occur in two ways, either information is conveyed in the narrative mode of display or narrative is conveyed in the factual mode of display. This is what seems, amongst other things, to create the tension: when Gradgrind speaks with Sissy Jupe’s words, or Jupe speaks with Gradgrind’s. The latter can be seen within the diorama where the narrative mode with factual meaning could undermine what the systematic museum wanted to achieve, it enabled less control of what could be read by the visitor.

However, the most troubling mismatch of meaning and mode, and the one more relevant to the objects of this research, is the mismatch between narrative meaning and factual mode. This mismatch (and therefore tension) is one that has troubled the contiguous object since it left the curiosity cabinet. Yet, even in contemporary display, this mismatch causes tension and discomfort to museum professionals. To return to the Tradescant objects, evidence of their troublesome nature is made clear by the repeated use of certain phrases on the labels that the modern Ashmolean Museum uses: “like”, “believed to have been”, “tradition has it”, and “reputed to be”. Troublesome objects like these appear to have been either marginalised or disciplined into kinds of typologies. During the 1920s the Tradescant objects were displayed in a cabinet on a landing and, up until a couple of years ago, were side-lined into a small room off a corridor between larger galleries. Some of the Tradescant collection, for example the Mantle of Pochahontas’ father and Henry VIII objects, are joined by other ‘problematic’ things collected by Elias Ashmole, Guy Fawkes’ lantern for example. The impression given is that they should be kept out of the way from the serious exhibits, that they do not fit anywhere in the museum. Further, in the recent refurbishment of the Ashmolean Museum, these objects have been dispersed in a larger gallery with other non-associated objects. Henry’s gloves are with other ‘historic’ gloves and his stirrups are in a cabinet of ‘European Ethnography’. They have been disciplined into some sort of typology.

This marginalising or disciplining of narrative objects can also occur where the biography is the primary focus. The information versus overt narrative dilemma was present for Caterina Albano when she curated an exhibition about Gregor Mendel (1822–84) in 2002. Gregor Mendel was an Augustine Friar and scientist who has been called the founder of the science of genetics for his experiments with pea plant heredity. The exhibition focused on conveying “...the intellectual and scientific context for Mendel’s seminal experiments on crossbreeding...” (Albano, 2007, p. 19). The problems, as Albano saw them, were the myths or excess narratives, that had accumulated around Mendel: “...we were confronted with the myth that surrounds Mendel’s life: that of the isolated friar who made a crucial scientific discovery leading to the development fifty years later of classical genetics, but whose contribution was recognized only after his death” (Albano, 2007, p. 19). With the myth, as she describes it,

came the problem of subjectivity; objects “acquiring subjective attributes. They move from the indifference of being an object to the subjectivity of having ‘a name, a personality, a past’” (Albano, 2007, p. 20). In the context of this chapter, they threaten the possible loss of accurate representation and factuality. The purpose of the exhibition was to convey information about the beginnings of genetics but the ‘myth’ interferes with that and threatens to be dominant.

Mendel’s glasses seem to have caused particular curatorial dilemma. She affirms their place as “...almost a trademark of Mendel’s somewhat limited iconography...”, but takes the decision to exclude them, and other personal items, from the exhibition (Albano, 2007, p. 20). The glasses were considered not to have sufficient proof of authenticity and were judged to carry irrelevant narratives which, she argues, did not “add to the understanding of his scientific endeavour or his personality.” Her use of words like “confront” and “problem” shows how, for her, the overtly narrative object troubles the display of objects. Despite the curator’s decision to remove the troublesome things from the display of Mendel’s intellectual and scientific context, they now have a displayed life in the permanent exhibition that followed. The narratives, or myths, of the isolated friar threaten to undermine the factuality of the display if its intention is to communicate information. The glasses brought excess narratives to the display, like Sissy Jupe’s elaborations to the facts; not having the benefit of authenticity and therefore factuality, bringing what the curator considered an inappropriate way of viewing the objects.

For the narrative object, the narrative is enough to convey the truth of the object, backed by the authority of either the church or the collector/connoisseur. For the factual object the truth of the object was a detached judgement passed on the object by a scientist. The public museum as society’s educator and conveyer of systematically arranged facts had gained authority in what it communicated to its visitor. As such, the exhibits within the museums could be said to carry similar authority. Therefore, the factual rhetoric has the effect of authenticating the contents of the museum, in similar ways to the medieval church’s authority lending credence to the objects it displayed. The mimetic diorama displays, which reflected popular entertainments and appeared to be embracing the narrativity of earlier practices, were legitimised by the authority of the factual rhetoric. At this intersection of the two rhetorical modes, the narrative is legitimised by its association with the public museum and the factual is narrativized. In theory this should be the best of both worlds, however they were not an easy match.

The nature of authenticity will be examined more closely in the next chapter. However, the question of the object’s truth and the museums authority takes us back to one of the questions that emerged from Cornelia Parker’s work: the authority of the artist/curator to narrate, articulate and even authenticate the object being displayed. In the consideration of both the narrative and the factual rhetoric, this chapter has begun to examine this authority, articulation and narration of objects, but to conclude it will consider how far this authority of the museum can be pushed by the narrative object. 221b Baker Street is an example of the

power of the museum to legitimise even the most narrative of objects. Presented as a museum reconstruction of Holmes' former residence, it uses all the established tools of the modern small house museum which use both period room displays and cabinet exhibition. The Baker Street house has room reconstructions on the first floor and exhibition rooms with cabinets to display objects on the second floor and, like the Mendel exhibit, to show the "intellectual context" in which its subject works and summarise his 'life' in objects. Museum conventions are predominantly adhered to as though it were as legitimate as any other small house museum in London.

Like the narrative object of the first rhetoric, the objects in the Holmes museum are displayed in order to narrate each other. They might be described as ciphers because without explanation or exposition they tell the visitor nothing. More than that, their absolute fictionality makes them analogous to the many 'fake' traded relics or the mythic (later considered misinterpreted) wonders of the cabinets. The saint's finger or the unicorn's horn, replaced by the briar pipe and the violin, with as many stories associated with them. These are read through oral means of the guides, visual through display, and textual through Conan Doyle's stories. The Baker Street display is antithetical to the factual rhetoric because it lacks encyclopaedic order but most of all in its fictionality. Its order is contextual and its meaning culturally specific; and the factual rhetoric would not recognise context or the elaboration of the culturally constructed. However, as we saw, this factuality is flawed by its very insistence upon fact, which is not as absolute as required, and cannot escape the context of its origin.

In relation to the intersection of the narrative and fact, the Baker street display stretches far beyond the former into total fictionality whilst using the authority of the latter's techniques. There is no tension because it is purely fictional, using the narrative mode and meaning, but benefiting from the factual rhetoric's ubiquity and authority. In the Baker Street house lays the paradox of the museum. The public museum encouraged the idea that its displays communicated the truth of the world. Therefore, it was an authority to which to refer. It then began using some of the techniques of more popular forms of display and resurrecting certain elements of pre-Enlightenment practices. These were legitimised by their use in public museums. Despite their theatricality, they are accepted as conveying the required information. Such diorama or period displays express a sense of 'this is how it was' and, any 'illusion' is at the service of verified information. However, by adopting such rhetoric, the museum legitimises the kinds of popular entertainments its forebears sought to supersede. The balance between the factuality and the narrativity shifts to allow 'illusion' in the service of, at best possible myth making, and at worst complete fabrication.

Chapter 2

Residues of the Past: Significant Traces and the Romantic Sensibility in the Biographical Object.

The previous chapter expanded upon the chronology initially proposed in the introduction; it showed how the display of the objects of this research had been adapted and survived in different forms: from the medieval through the encyclopaedic into the twentieth-century museum. It also described how the objects' 'little histories' were narrated through display. This chapter will seek to further account for the nineteenth-century origins of contemporary biographical object display. The nineteenth century saw the rise of literary collectors, increasing tourism to the homes and haunts of the famous, as well as the foundations of some of the museums that have provided the template for the many twentieth-century foundations. It also saw the proliferation of such displays towards the end of the century, as outlined in the introduction. What was it about the nineteenth century that produced these biographical objects and their displays?

This chapter will consider how distinctive nineteenth-century relations to the material past might explain the biographical object and its display. The historical, and therefore the biographical, object can be viewed as examples of museum artefacts that can be categorised and displayed, as described in Chapter One. However, the particularity of the biographical object implies that its historicity is more complicated; its particular past is some way perceived as materially embedded. This implies that these objects are perceived to carry their past within them as an inherent quality; that it is readable through the object, not merely readable in verbal and representational forms. If this is the case, then the past is made material in the present and can be accessed and experienced through the object. This is similar to the ways the relic embodied the holy figure and allowed the pilgrim contact. This sensibility lies at the heart of the development of the biographical object.

This chapter will begin by examining in what ways Romanticism and historicism can have influenced our disposition towards biographical objects and their later display. It will then move to consider objects more particularly, and the past as a quality inherent in them and, how this quality is formed from both duration (prolonged association) and specific moments of association. It will conclude by considering how Romanticism and this material quality create biographical objects and influence their display; examining the biographical museum's emphasis upon the locus of the subject's '*work*' and the signification of objects by association

with the process of its creation. This chapter will consider the activities of Sir Walter Scott: and the objects and museums of Jane Austen, James Watt, Charles Dickens and Charles Darwin.

There are two interrelated nineteenth-century perspectives whose influence shows in the escalation in collection and display of biographical objects: the remnants of Romanticism and what might be called the historical sensibility or historicism. These two terms require some explanation and their interrelationship expanded upon. Romanticism emerged from late eighteenth-century Europe and was a movement in art, literature and music which emphasised feeling and individuality and preferred the picturesque and the natural. It has been viewed as a reaction to the classicism that preceded it, which preferred classical (Greek/Roman) form, order and proportion. Romantic figures include Wordsworth, Coleridge, Robert Burns, Beethoven, Wagner, Turner, Blake and Delacroix, all of whom have, or have had, biographical displays created from associated objects in associated places.¹

Most writers on the subject agree upon the increased importance placed upon the individual experience and a sense of self. Historian Peter Gay (1998) includes Romanticism as a major element of his examination of the nineteenth-century bourgeois experience and its preoccupation with the self. The focus on inwardness and the importance of individual experience can also be seen in the shift in interest in the arts, from the created work to its creator, or as literary critic Northrop Frye termed it, “an interest in the poetic process as distinct from the product” (Frye, 1956, p. 147). When the creator was at the centre of aesthetic activity, and imagination and emotion were considered central to human experience, then it was perhaps inevitable that the focus turned to the artist, the composer and the writer and further created the fascination with, and cult of, the genius.

Romanticism has also been viewed as a reaction against the Enlightenment, and the Dicken’s character of Gradgrind is used as an analogy for all that was being reacted against by historians Löwy and Sayre in their book *Romanticism Against the Tide of Modernity*. They frame Romanticism as a critique of modernity, a reaction against capitalism and industrialisation and reaction to the disenchantment of society (Löwy and Sayre, 2001, p. 17). They view it as bound up with a sense that something precious had been lost (Löwy and Sayre, 2001, p. 21). Further, that Romanticism was considered as a form of resistance to the dehumanisation of human life that industrialisation was considered to have caused (Löwy and Sayre, 2001, p. 25). In response to the sense of loss, there was a turn to a pre-capitalist and pre-industrial past. In that sense, Romanticism is viewed as an attempt to re-enchant the world (Gay, 1998, p. 37; Löwy and Sayre, 2001, p. 30). Under the umbrella of Romanticism can be included nineteenth-century medievalism, the cult of strong emotion, subjectivism, and an

¹ There was a biographical display about William Blake in the Ashmolean in 2014, and in 2015, his house in Sussex was ‘bought for the nation’. It was the house in which he wrote *Jerusalem* (later set to music by Hubert Parry).

interest in nature, mythology, folklore, symbolism and imagination (Löwy and Sayre, 2001, p. 5).

The second nineteenth-century perspective that influenced biographical display is intimately related to Romanticism: a historical sensibility, or historicism, a longing for the past. This became stronger over the course of the century; the most obvious example of which is the Romantic fascination with architectural ruins and historical remains in the landscape, a continuation of the previous century's preoccupation. As part of his examination of representation of the past in nineteenth-century museums from an art historical and literary perspective, Didier Maleuvre (1999) considers the appeal of ruins during the period and the aura that surrounds them. He argues that the appeal of the ruin became a marker of a sense of an authentic sense of the past. This authentic past was what the Romantics longed for and the 'authentic' fragments of that past, in the form of ruins and historical artefacts, gave a material focus for that longing.

Later nineteenth-century society delighted in what Henry James called a "palpable imaginable visitable past" (1908) . This was a sense of the past: a particular attitude toward and series of assumptions about the past. This was in part born out of the century's discoveries and theories which, whilst showing the transience of human existence, also supported the idea that the past existed in the present, if read correctly. In this way, the century of science and industry was also the century that looked to the past. Relatively new disciplines like geology and palaeontology were beginning to show that the earth was far older than the Bible implied: "Many nineteenth-century scholars surmised that the whole historical record survived somewhere; given the right techniques, nothing would elude retrieval." (Lowenthal, 1985, p. 19) Yet, at the same time, they were showing that the past was stored in things and therefore available in the present. In that, the vast passages of time were apparent in the strata of the rock and long extinct creatures were embedded in those strata. By reading those strata and deposits, immense stretches of time were literally embedded in the present. Another emerging discipline, archaeology, was beginning to show how the human past is stored as residues in the ground to be available if one knew where to look. Layers of time were stored in the ground beneath people's feet. These disciplines showed that the past was readable in more than just textual form.

Another important aspect of the historical sensibility can be found in the cultural products of the century: novels, paintings and illustrations. Historical representation had an effect upon the way in which the past was perceived and desired. As Carolyn Steedman argues:

Longing for the past was expressed in many ways in the first half of the nineteenth century: records and documents were preserved and catalogued; the Archive was born; museums, collections, historical pageants and antiquarian societies came into being; the disciplines of anthropology, archaeology, mythology and History itself, all developed as means of inquiry into the past. Nostalgia – longing temporalised in the desire for a particular past – was formalised, and the historical novel was part of the process. (Steedman, 2001, p. 91)

The consumption of past seen in the rise of historical novels, from authors such as George Eliot and Walter Scott, was one aspect of the change in society's sense of the past. One aspect of the historical novel, which most clearly contributed to the sense of the past, was the way in which it, along with other representative media, facilitated the reader imagination. It did this by representing the past as real, meaning that the gap between the past and the representation of the past became negligible, which further allowed a 'palpable imaginable visitable past'. Historical representation in the nineteenth century looked for the lifelike, or *verité*, in representation which allowed for very little gap between the thing and its image. In his examination of nineteenth-century historical representation, Stephen Bann (1984; 1990) discusses the ways in which representation moved towards techniques of recreation in representing the past in contrast to the previous century in which historical representation acknowledged the simulated nature of representation. The first section considers this nineteenth-century context. It examines the aesthetic appreciation of the past, the influence of historical representation and the Romantic cult of the genius as potential stimulants for biographical museum practice.

Sense of the Particular Past: Romanticism, Representation and Genius

In the preface to his 1908 novella *The Aspern Papers* (1908), Henry James outlines the inspiration behind his story, the collector Edward Silsbee and his cultivation of Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley's sister-in-law in obtaining Shelley's 'relics'. From this 'myth' as he describes it, and Claire Clairmont's life,² the idea of the story emerged; this case had the air of the past which appealed to him. James stated that, "I delight in a palpable imaginable visitable past... the marks and signs of a world we may reach over to as by making a long arm we grasp as object at the other end of our own table" (James, 1908, p. 212). In this short statement he sums up the sensibility that deeply influenced biographical objects and display. What follows in section one considers those three adjectives palpable (or tangible), imaginable and visitable in relation to the nineteenth-century sense of the past.

The notion of the palpable past, a past that can be touched or felt, runs through the nineteenth century and more specifically in the Romantic historical sensibility. Although clearly Romanticism did not invent the idea of the material past, its particular appreciation of the material past profoundly influenced later generations and can be described as a form of aesthetic antiquarianism. During the eighteenth century, it was the material remains of the Greek and Roman civilisations seen on the grand tours, undertaken by the aristocracy, which were most valued. Visible (material) signs of age were not considered of aesthetic value until the mid-eighteenth century (Lowenthal, 1985, p. 156). However, the material past, for which

² Claire Clairmont was Shelley's sister-in-law, and Byron's lover

the Romantics discovered an appreciation, was more localized and/or more recent.³ Early archaeological investigation of the prehistoric monuments, like Stonehenge by William Stukeley in the mid eighteenth century, caused a reappraisal and new appreciation of historic British sites in antiquarian circles. The medieval past too became more appreciated in part as a reaction against classicism. The remnants of the British past were of both intellectual and aesthetic interest.

Ruins, both actual and imagined, are a trope of Romanticism, specifically part of the ideal of Romantic scenery and the picturesque (Lowenthal, 1985, p. 148). The Romantic poets such as Wordsworth, artists such as Turner and writers such as Walter Scott, elevated ruins such as Tintern Abbey and Melrose Abbey into valued places which were admired for the signs of their antiquity.⁴ Once represented in paint or poetry, these ruins and their physical decay became aesthetically pleasing as their representations. The picturesque ruin evoked their idea of the medieval past in the Romantic imagination (Dillon, 2014). This notion of the medieval past was seen as an ideal, a semi-utopia, a “golden age of community” and “cosmological coherency” (Bennett, 2001). The ruin, dilapidated and overrun with moss and ivy, “ornaments of time”, stood for the triumph of nature over culture (Dillon, 2014, p. 10) or, at the least, reconciliation between nature and culture (Maleuvre, 1999, p. 85). This represented the possibility of nature (pre-industrialised society) overcoming the new ‘soulless’ culture of industrialised rationalised society.

The appeal of the material past in this form is created through Romanticism’s inherent nostalgia or longing for what was an idealised past.

The soul ardently desires to go home again, to return to its homeland, in the spiritual sense, and this nostalgia is at the heart of the Romantic attitude. What is lacking in the present existed once upon a time, in a more or less distant past. The defining characteristic of that past is its difference from the present: the past is the period in which the various modern alienations did not yet exist. (Löwy and Sayre, 2001, p. 22)

This “nostalgia” was tied up with the appreciation of the past through its remains. The material past gives it form. The word nostalgia is etymologically connected to the idea of homesickness, and, therefore, home. To reach back into, or long for, the past, whether through its objects or imaginatively, was a search for a sense of home; a place of belonging, protection and sense of origins both individually and culturally. It is probably no coincidence that home is the etymological origin of other words associated with the material past. The French have the word *patrimoine* which stems from the word for homeland that has become their equivalent of the English word heritage. Both these words are also semantically associated with inheritance. The nostalgia for the material past then is a longing for home whether family, community or

³ This was related to the Napoleonic war, which curtailed the aristocracy’s ability to make their grand tours, and resulted in increasing tours of the British Isles.

⁴ http://www.bbc.co.uk/poetryseason/poems/tintern_abbey.shtml
<http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/turner-tintern-abbey-the-crossing-and-chancel-looking-towards-the-east-window-d00374>

nation, and an inheritance from the ancestral community. In each case, it is a pursuit of origins or, at the least, a connection to a perceived origin.

Sir Walter Scott, (1771-1832) Scottish poet and historical novelist, provides an example of that impulse. He took the longing for the material past into both life and work. Between 1811-1817, he converted Abbotsford from an old farmhouse called 'Clartyhole' into "an architectural fantasy which inaugurated the Victorian Scottish baronial style" (Watson, 2006, p. 93). The ruins of Dryburgh Abbey directly inspired the building of his house, Abbotsford. He created a pseudo medieval stately pile that could just as easily have been the home of a character from one of his historical novels. The building re-imagined the past and he filled it with a "large miscellany of historical curiosities" (Watson, 2006, p. 93). Scott's longing for his ancestral past was tied up with this ruined abbey. His family had lost Dryburgh Abbey through the imprudence of his ancestors (Bann, 1984, p. 97). His nostalgia for that past was literally a homesickness and a loss of inheritance.

When the material past stands for this longed-for sense of origin, it gains a value beyond just aesthetic appeal. The patina of age apparent in the ruined abbey was aesthetically pleasing; something to be mused over. It was a way of looking, its presence a prime ingredient in Romantic scenery, and it "became an adjunct to worthy sentiments" (Lowenthal, 1985, p. 148). It is considered to have cultural value, gained through the works of Turner and the Romantic poets. As an inheritance, the material past becomes something culture has a right to and must be protected from losing. The marks of the past upon objects become signs of value. "Time was felt to ripen artefacts, the marks of age to enhance..." (Lowenthal, 1985, p. 148). The signs of decay on the material past become not only aesthetically pleasing but also the signs of culture's inheritance from the past.

In the valuing of the material past lies an irony; we long for origins and appreciate the "ornaments of time", but the objects of our longing are constantly in a state of slipping away from us. The ruin is as it is because time is erasing it. The signs of time passing are the signs of the object's destruction, as well as of its value. Further, during the nineteenth century, as these signs and an aesthetic ideal of the material past became established, the authentic sense of the past, which it seemed to enable, was undermined by artifice and accelerated ruination. Appreciation of the past in the later nineteenth century went hand in hand with conservation and preservation: the protection of the nation's inheritance. The material past became something that needed protecting not only from natural destruction but also from the unthinking interference of the unknowing. Two other biographical display subjects dominate this later Romantic impulse: writer and art critic John Ruskin and author and designer William Morris.

John Ruskin saw in Venice what enthusiastic but ill-judged restoration could do to an old building and his position informed late nineteenth-century restoration philosophy. Ruskin took aesthetic delight in wear and tear while Victorian restoration tended to do away with such

patina. It was in the mid-to-late nineteenth century that the preservation, rather than the restoration of historic sites and old buildings, became a cause for men like William Morris. The tangible past was disappearing through either neglect or ill-judged restoration. Morris was outraged by what he saw as vandalism in the restoration (or part demolition) of a church in Burford (Gloucestershire) (Cowell, 2008, p. 76). This contributed to the formation of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB). Although relating to buildings, its tenets are typical of the wider preservation turn which continues to the present day.

In the SPAB manifesto, Morris puts the case against restoration and for preservation, in essence advocating the principles of arrested decay and condition management. He calls restoration

... a strange and most fatal idea, which by its very name implies that it is possible to strip from a building this, that, and the other part of history - of its life that is - and then to stay the hand at some arbitrary point, and leave it still historical, living, and even as it once was ...so that the appearance of antiquity is taken away from such old parts of the fabric as are left, and there is no laying to rest in the spectator the suspicion of what may have been lost; and in short, a feeble and lifeless forgery is the final result of all the wasted labour (Morris, 1877).

To preserve, and to maintain condition, was a means of arresting decay without denying it or trying to return the building to the imagined view of an earlier time. In this, he and Ruskin are promoting the same idea. Restoration was pretence whereas his idea of protection made everything that happened to the building clear in its conservation. Therefore, whilst to preserve the look of age was to protect something authentic, to restore was an act of pretence, of artifice. It wipes away years of an object's past and, because the identity of individuals and societies are tied to such pasts, wipes those away as well. The appreciation of the past was a longing for the past and for origins which clearly flowed into the remainder of the century. However, it was a longing for an authentic past without which the experience could not satisfy. Henry James' "palpable visitable past" was created from an underlying desire for origins and a sense of authenticity.

The final element of Henry James' delight in the past was the imaginable past; to imagine being able to "reach over to [the past] as by making a long arm we grasp an object at the other end of our own table" (1908, p. 12). The material remains would not be enough, to sense the past in the present, without the historical imagination. The change in historical representation in the nineteenth century greatly assisted the sense of the past in which James delighted. The way in which the past was represented, through words and images, would influence how it was viewed in reality and cultural longing for the past: for example, the historical novel.

Walter Scott is widely credited as being the first historical novelist and with inventing the historical novel (Oxford University Press, 2004).⁵ Many of his novels, written in the early nineteenth century were set in the mid eighteenth century and used the Jacobite wars as their

⁵ In fact, Scott was preceded by the historical novelist Jane Porter (1776-1850). See McLean 2007 - Nobody's Argument: Jane Porter and the Historical Novel. *Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies*, 7(2) pp. 88-10

backdrop. He used real figures, events and places from established histories about that time. He also had a deep interest in the native folklore and ballads. His novels became wildly popular and his concern for Scotland's history, nationhood and places has caused one recent biographer to describe him as the man who invented a nation (Kelly, 2010). The longing created by the events in his novels has a similar sense of homesickness as the nostalgia for the material past described earlier. The difference comes from the way that these fictional stories represent the history they portray.

In her book *Dust* (2001), Carolyn Steedman examines both George Eliot and Walter Scott as historical novelists. She considers that the period setting they chose to write in, within living memory of their first readers, enabled the past to live for the reader. The events depicted were distant enough from contemporary experience not to descend into what Scott called a 'novel of manners' but far enough away to prompt nostalgia in their reader (Steedman, 2001, p. 91). The action would take place just out of current memory but within generational memory: better enabling a sense of the real and life as it really was, despite its fictionality. Works of fiction could allow the past to live in the reader's imagination far more effectively than a work of historical writing though the latter, by adopting more narrative and illustrative forms, was becoming more evocative. Once the past lives in the imagination, in this way, then the sense of the past living in objects and places (tangible past) is made possible; historical representation encourages this sense when that representation is life-like.

Stephen Bann describes the shift that occurred in historical representation in the nineteenth century. In the eighteenth century, all representation was viewed as imitation. Therefore, in the classical aesthetic, the notion of life-like representation was not conceivable; *vraisemblance* in historical representation acknowledged the simulated nature of representation (Bann, 1984, p. 14). In the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, he sees a move away from *vraisemblance* towards *vérité* or the 'utopia of life-like representation' (Bann, 1984, p. 15). In the life-like as opposed to the mimetic, the ideal is not that the fact of the representation be clear (acknowledged) but that there be no gap between the thing and its image: where the representation reflected reality. Life-like historical representation was another means of encouraging the sense of the past lingering in the present because the reader/viewer is able to picture that moment in history through these written and illustrated prompts. Bann views the visual image as part of the 'general movement towards rediscovering and recreating the past' (Bann, 1984, p. 55). He points to a change in historical texts, which began including maps, plans and monuments, 'to a portrayal of actual moments in the narration' (Bann, 1984, p. 54). Later in the nineteenth century, photography brought a whole new level of *vérité* to historical representation. The past could be captured and time frozen, allowing a preserved, and therefore imaginable, past in the present. It also offered more detail than the illustration could portray, revealing "material physiognomic aspects, image worlds which dwell in the smallest things" (Benjamin, 1999c, p. 512).

History writing became more narrative in style, just as novels became more realist in their content. Through narration and illustration the past lives in the present, further encouraging the sense of a past hidden in plain sight if we would only but look for it. They make the past recognisable, and imaginable, in the present especially if the illustrated moment took place in somewhere that is still visitable. This was certainly the case in Scott's novels where the reader could use them, and frequently did, as a tourist itinerary. The sites became illustrative of a creative work and the creative work associated the sites with the historical sensibility. Scott's novels laid great importance on the landscape and its ruins as players in the histories he was narrating and this narrowed the gap between the reader/visitor and the history being told.

It is perhaps unsurprising that Scott and his books were subjects of literary tourism because they gave the reader both the imaginable past and real locations in which to situate it. Literary tourism had started during grand tours with visits to the places where figures like Petrarch had lived (Hendrix, 2012, p. 15), moving on to the graves of Keats and Shelley in Rome (Watson, 2006, p. 48). Literary tourism goes further during the nineteenth century, sites increasingly included locations where novels had been set: creative associations were joined by illustrative associations. However, there was another impulse that ran alongside this, and historicism, in instigating the sensibility that helped create biographical object display. It was when these realist novels and Romantic poems began to be viewed as semi-autobiographical. Sometimes this was literal, real events in Charlotte Brontë's novels for example, but more often, it was the reader wishing to see something of the author in their work.

The author became an extension of their own text (Watson, 2006). It was not enough to merely read and enjoy the works, to engage fully with the works of Wordsworth, for example, the reader should visit Dove Cottage or Rydal Mount, where works were created. Watson states that, "the readerly impulse to locate author and text within real places may have been born out of the extended nineteenth-century's love affair with biography and with realist fiction" (Watson, 2006, p. 201). To know the individual's life was to understand more of their work and to know the work was a means of understanding their life. Biography will be examined further in Chapter Three. However, in the context of this chapter, the interest lies in a particular Romantic adoration of creative lives.

The desire to be in the places once occupied by writers and poets, and represented by their work, is closely connected both to notions of genius and to the closely connected idea of the genius loci. The Romantic movement made the individual 'creative genius' into a cult figure. Romanticism's emphasis on inspiration, intense emotional experiences, and the primacy of the individual transformed the notion of genius. Before the eighteenth century, it was a characteristic possessed by all talented people in varying degrees but towards the end of the eighteenth century the notion began to change. "Genius gradually became a label not for a human characteristic, but for a singular man who - like the mad - was set apart from the rest of society" (Fara, 2003, p. 15). The notion of genius made the creative individual into a

rarefied creature. The creative labours of a 'Great man', became what Richard Shiff calls, "...auraticized act[s] of Romantic Genius" (Shiff, 1992, p. 298).

Just as literary tourism has drawn comparison with religious pilgrimage, so several authors have highlighted religious analogies used to describe genius. Patricia Fara begins her examination *Newton: The Making of Genius* (2003) with a chapter on sanctity: "As Romantic authors attempted to reach beyond individual ability to articulate as ungraspable absolute, they imbued genius with an aura previously reserved for religious ideologies" (Fara, 2003, p. 15). These rarefied creatures receive their inspiration and ability as if from nowhere or, in the religious figure, from God. At a time when religion was, for some, becoming less central to their lives, the literary genius provided a form of substitute. Fara was concerned with scientists; however, it was in literature that the much of the quasi-religious feeling was apparent.

Poetry was experienced as a religion...Literature was not just medicine for the sick soul, it was inspirational, transformative, a journey of self-discovery...As literature became religion, the writer became the sage, the prophet, the inspirational preacher and leader – the guide to one's internal life. (Goldhill, 2011, p. 7)

In this, the poet/writer becomes like a literary saint. The poet wandering the landscape receiving inspiration like divine guidance became likened to the wandering prophet, whose words and presence elevated the lives of others.

The other archetype of the genius, whilst also being an isolated figure, is closeted in a garret. This idea was profoundly influenced by the death of poet Thomas Chatterton⁶ who died in an attic, and whose life and tragically early death were mythologized by Coleridge, Shelley and Wordsworth, and later in the century by the painting by Henry Wallis in 1858) (Blanning, 2010, p. 108). Anne Trubek, in her *Skeptic's Guide to Writers' Houses* (2011), describes this notion of genius: "...the most common cultural image ... is the Romantic genius, alone, in a garret, writing furiously, crumpling papers and throwing them on the floor, losing track of time, heedless of the public, obsessed with his imagination" (Trubek, 2011, p. 55). This alternative notion of the genius was less about the writer as prophet and more about the intensity of the creative process. This genius is a semi-tragic figure but their suffering and isolation is integral to the image. They suffer for their art and their struggle was one to be admired. These two elements of the genius mythology look to have emerged fairly simultaneously but the wandering poet and the struggling artist may have come from slightly different traditions. The former more closely related to the older church practices of saints, and the latter to the protestant ethic of perseverance and hard work.

In either case, the Romantic genius is closely connected to their surroundings. The individual genius becomes conflated with the notion of the genius loci: where the people of a place are infused, or inspired by, the essence, or unique nature, of a place. The genius was

⁶ Interesting to note that Chatterton was a poet who created (forged) pseudo-medieval ballad poems under a fictitious monk's name – creating poems that appealed to the same reading public as the minstrel ballads Scott collected around the Scottish Borders.

an essence unique to the individual but capable of originating in place. Therefore, landscapes became affective sites through association with the act of inspiration: Wordsworth and the Lake District, for example. The creative subject is infused or inspired with the essence of place but, in return, the place is infused with the essence of that creative act. In 1811, a journalist in *European Magazine*, writing in support a campaign to open Isaac Newton's former London home, expressed a similar view, "Genius, or, more properly, inspiration, dignifies every spot on which its energies have been elicited...its site may be termed classic ground" (Fara, 2003, p. 231). This interrelationship between the genius and their surroundings produced the circumstances that created Romantic literary tourism, and, as we shall see, the sensibility that creates the biographical museum as site of the genius at work and the elevation of the study, to be discussed later in this chapter.

Significance of Decay: Past as a Quality Inherent in the Object

This section turns to the object as subject of the sensibility discussed above; it also more closely considers how an object's past becomes perceived as an inherent quality as opposed to being read through it. The influence of this sensibility is apparent on both the historical and the biographical object and the object becomes the locus for the longing for the past, whether general or specific to a person. The quality of past-ness is embedded into the objects in two ways and these two will provide the framework of this section of the chapter. The first is based upon time, or duration, and the way this inscribes the objects with both narrative and physical signs of its history. The second is based upon a moment, a point in time which inscribes the objects with a particular association that dominates its signification; a particular associative moment that prompts a need for preservation.

Jane Austen's House Museum, Chawton in Hampshire, displays her writing table in front of the window at which she used to write, illustrated in Figure 1. The table is associated with the writing of many of her novels. The panel above it reads,

It was at this little table that Jane is reputed to have written. She wrote after breakfast each morning. In the evenings, she was said sometimes to have rushed from the Drawing Room with a smile on her face in order to write something down before she forgot it. Soon after Jane's death, Mrs Austen gave an elderly servant the table for his cottage. Many years later this table which has so much significance was returned here.

In this short piece of interpretative material, or textual exposition, the museum is describing two methods of signification: the first is the narrative of its use by Austen; the second is the narrative of its life after this use. In both instances the signification is created by time or duration; one the story of habitual use, the other of what had happened to the table since that use.

Jane Austen's use of the table is the primary reason for its display and modern signification but there are further narratives associated with the table that create its provenance. The



Figure 1 - Jane Austen's table. Photograph: Caroline Morris

provenance is a series of narratives which provide a chain of unbroken links between the significant moment or individual and the object's contemporary display. In the example of Jane Austen's table, the connections are from the Austen family, to the family servant and back to the Austen house. Each exchange of ownership provides a link in the chain of connections between the significant owner and later generations. Each of the links in the chain of possession are witnesses to the objects authentic connection to the admired past. Ideally the objects would have remained in the family, as in the example of many of the Darwin objects in Down House which have been held by direct Darwin descendants: a defined and closed chain of possession. Authenticity in this sense is about that nostalgia for origin. It is based upon a connection to an admired past which gives the sense of an origin and authenticity. The layers of provenance are a sequential connection to the past that reassures the modern viewer; they reiterate the longed for connection between the modern and the past.

The Austen table has clearly seen use and we are assured of the cause in its narrative provenance. These associative narratives of use change the way the visible signs of wear are perceived; these are what I have termed the table's material provenance. Signs of use can be attributed to the same events that are significant in the narrative provenance. The past is made

manifest. In this attention to the signs of age in the object, we return to the Romantic's delight in the tangible past and what the historical sensibility most contributes to this quality of past-ness which originates in the love of ruins. The Romantics had aesthetically appreciated the ruin for marks or signs of its age. The decay in the ruin revealed its antiquity and created an authentic sense of the past. In the object wear and patina, whether on delicate pieces of furniture or functional objects, is a "guarantor of antiquity" (Lowenthal, 1985, p. 149).⁷ Whilst the art object may be devalued by the patina of age, the artefact is made significant by its patina. In the wear the object's past is made tangible and, by extension, a wider sense of past is given material form.

In the biographical object, like the Austen table, the difference is that the decay is significant, not just for its confirmation of age, but for its confirmation that Jane Austen has handled this object in combination with the provenance. In this way, decay gives material form to her memory even if one cannot with certainty ascribe every graze on the table's surface to her hand. However, the authentically patinated object has the layers of its past written in its decay and those layers, though not necessarily physical, are comparable to the "Mystic Writing-Pad" (1925). In this essay, Freud uses the writing pad as an analogy for the memory and the lasting traces of the past, which remain to be accessed (Freud, 2008, p. 211). The "Mystic Writing-Pad" initially looks like an ordinary writing surface but, on closer examination, Freud says that its construction bares similarities to his ideas of the memory: a receptive surface that is always ready and lasting traces of the notes recorded (Freud, 2008, p. 212).⁸ Looking under both sheets, Freud saw that the erased writing remains on the wax beneath. This is his analogy for the way the perception functions. The memory and the "Mystic Writing-Pad" allow a blank page for fresh perception and storage for retrieval of older perceptions. The trace of the subject's past is impressed upon their objects just as the past is etched into the historical object in its patina or as the message is inscribed on the wax. However, this does not completely explain these objects quality of past-ness, the evocativity of its wear.

Wear, and the authenticity it is perceived to prove, can be understood in terms of the aura. Indeed, it is in the idea of the aura that we can better understand the quality of past-ness that biographical objects can have. It is a quality which is created by association and affirmed by the evidence of the subject's touch. Handling or touch produces wear and, although wear implies trace, this quality created by it also implies aura. In his essay "Handling Shocks", Richard Shiff draws attention to the repeated analogies of handling in Walter Benjamin's writing on aura and more specifically the marks of the artist's (or potter's) hand left on the pot.⁹ Shiff says that "handling ...produces aura, just as rubbing a surface lends it a shine..." (Shiff,

⁷ David Lowenthal formulates four themes for the appearance of age in things; the idea that old things should look old, the aesthetic delight in wear and tear, and the faith in decay as a guarantor of antiquity (Lowenthal, 1985, p. 149).

⁸ The notepad comprises a layer of brown resin in a paper frame with a thin translucent sheet over the top made up of two layers. The act of writing on the surface presses the sheet onto the wax, causing the written area to be darker. By lifting the sheet, the writing disappears. (Freud, 2008)

⁹ On Some Motifs in Baudelaire (Benjamin, 1999d, pp. 156, 182)

1992, p. 93). Moreover, the aura, as a means to understand this quality of past-ness, is shown, in the way that these artefacts are seen by the historical sensibility, to both retain and release their past. These objects retain it in the way they appear to be porous to people, places and events that have been associated with them. They release it in the way in which they expose their surroundings with their past-ness and sense of authenticity.

Sir Walter Scott's house gives an example in architectural terms, which makes the process clear. Scott went to great lengths to give his new house a sense of the history he made so much a part of his life and, less overtly, a sense of authenticity. Besides the medieval style and house's contents, he deliberately included pieces of existing older buildings, including the ruined Melrose Abbey, into the structure of his rebuilt house (Bann, 1984, p. 101). Stephen Bann uses the term "structures of transference" to describe what Scott did. "An object detached from a greater whole, becomes the part which irradiates a new whole..." (Bann, 1984, p. 102). The inclusion of pieces of historical ruins does give the appearance of a man attempting to authenticate his new house with the radiated past of the old. Bann's use of the word irradiate implies that the past influences objects when exposed to it. This is analogous of the relic practice discussed earlier. The way in which the object's past, whether historical or biographical, seems to permeate places and objects directly echoes the ways in which relics were used to consecrate churches. As a term, irradiate (or radiate) describes this effect without relying upon the term consecration. The way in which both the historical and biographical object validate (authenticate) the spaces in which they are placed is remarkably similar to consecration. The stonework taken from a building transfers its significance onto the new building. It is a transference, or consecration, of his home. Bann describes this transference as being Scott's attempts to create a substitute inheritance compensating for the lost inheritance of Dryburgh Abbey (Bann, 1984, p. 97).¹⁰ The historically saturated stone is able to consecrate the new building with its historicalness. The tangible past presented him with an opportunity to reconstruct his inheritance, despite its loss. In this can be seen the way in which, more generally, the past was used to compensate for what was considered a lost inheritance.

The way that Scott historically consecrated his home confirms the analogy that Jean Baudrillard uses in his book *System of Objects* (2005). As part of what he calls a quest for authenticity, he cites an article about an architect who was restoring an old farmhouse. In it, the architect explains the things that had to be added but makes very clear how much of the *original* structure remains: beams, stone blocks, and tiles. This, Baudrillard says, provides the house with "fitting symbolic foundations," which "reinvest the whole edifice with value" (2005, p. 82). He goes further by making the comparison with the church.

Rather as a church does not become a genuinely sacred place until a few bones or relics have been enshrined in it, so this architect cannot feel at home ...until he can sense the infinitesimal yet sublime presence within his brand new walls of an old stone that bears witness to past generations. (Baudrillard, 2005, p. 82)

¹⁰ An imprudent ancestor had lost the family land generations before.

The architect, Sir Walter Scott and, to a certain extent the church, use associative objects to transfer significance into their structures as a means of validation. For the church, it is a validation of their holiness; for Scott and the architect a confirmation of heritage: they both use historical objects as a means of validating the present.

This shows that origins can convey something of their sense of authenticity to the new, or even, inauthentic. The quest for a sense of authenticity can lead to almost mystical acts of transference; for example, when Henry Ford moved Edison's laboratory (building and all), he made sure that the movers dug up tonnes of earth from underneath the building to put under the new foundations (Conn, 1998). It is as though the building was some kind of architectural vampire, which could only retain its power if it slept on the ground of its homeland. So much so, that the perceived transmissibility of 'authentic' objects can validate that which does not have similar heritage. The historical object, that is considered to retain the history to which it has been subjected as a transmissible quality, can be considered as like the soil excavated by Ford. It provides the foundation, the ancestry and the heritage to counteract the sense that, as a culture, we may have lost something.

The presence of associative objects that have provenance radiate their past-ness into less associated objects and places. This is something which has also been described as 'relative authenticity' in relation to period room displays (Keeble, 2006, p. 3), considered further in Section Three. In the Elgar Birthplace museum, despite the limited time in which Elgar lived in the house (examined more closely in Chapter Three), the house as a museum is enhanced in its Elgar-ness by the presence of associative objects which radiate their association into the display. Likewise, the Freud Museum, located in the house in which Freud only lived in for a short period, benefits from the presence of all the objects in their right order from his Vienna study. The specific nature of the biographical object and display in relation to this sensibility will be further examined in the final section of this chapter.

So far, in this section, the objects have acquired significance through the passage of time inscribing them with both narrative and material provenances. What follows considers the way in which objects are made contiguous by a certain time: as though the clock stopped for the object at a particular moment. Although, in some senses, this is the opposite of the idea of duration (trace and provenance) as a creator of significance, it is as important and as connected to the historical sensibility. I wish to begin this with a description of a short story by Arthur Conan Doyle. "The Leather Funnel" (1902) tells the story of two men (the narrator and his friend Dacre) who spend a convivial evening together talking over Dacre's collection of unusual books and objects. The narrator's eye falls upon an enigmatic object which he discovers to be a large leather funnel, with a brass collar on both its rims, but with considerable damage at its spout. He asks about its history and, in response, Dacre talks about the science of dreams. He goes on to explain how he used these dreams to understand objects.

According to my theory, any object which has been intimately associated with any supreme paroxysm of human emotion, whether it be joy or pain, will retain a certain atmosphere or association which it is capable of communicating to a sensitive mind. By a sensitive mind I do not mean an abnormal one, but such a trained and educated mind as you or I possess. (Doyle, 1902, no page)

Dacre claims that, by sleeping by an object, he could see it in its original use. He then insists that the narrator sleeps by the funnel. During the night, the narrator dreams of the funnel's use as a seventeenth-century instrument of torture. The two men had had the same dream about its use which was confirmed by a little historical research and the inscriptions upon the brass collar.¹¹

This story is of relevance because of Dacre's theory; that human emotion can be retained in objects which could be communicated to a 'sensitive' mind. In some ways, this early twentieth-century story¹² illustrates the historical sensibility towards certain objects and its view of an object's past-ness as an inherent quality. Translate the violent event in the story to the strong emotions of Romantic poets, such as Keats and Shelley, and one has not only an analogy for the response to their objects but a sign that this sensibility continued through to the end of century.

The dream, though, does not stand on its own. Following the narrator's experience, Dacre takes him through not only the physical signs that affirm the dream but also the historical research that he has done. The veracity of the dream is only proven once some form of authentication had been provided. Perhaps this is unsurprising in a story about an object projecting its history into a dream. However, the importance of physical signs and the historical narrative combined are revealing. The quality understood to be inherent in objects that have been subject to the strong emotions so beloved of this sensibility still require their origin to be affirmed in some way.

This affirmation of a connection not only confirms the association and therefore the object's significance but also seals the object at a particular point of origin. A funnel or desk becomes THE funnel or THE desk, its definite article gains emphasis. It is an object that, through its connection to a defining moment or significant person, is made unique. The origin of its significance is fixed at a point of contact or association with that moment or person. Only the original can properly consecrate, as the relic in the church, and provide the connection to its origin, whether a person or event. In the case of the biographical object, the fact of being THE object is what gives the object its ineffable quality; Jane Austen's table is specifically signified

¹¹ In another Doyle short story, "The Silver Mirror", the object (a mirror that had once belonged to Mary, Queen of Scots) is able to literally reflect the scenes that it had witnessed (in that case the murder of Rizzio) to the early twentieth century narrator (Doyle, 1910). The mirror provided a window into the violent past that it had witnessed. This story also reflects the ways in which historical objects are desired to function, as a means of close contact.

¹² This is also an example of Doyle's interest in Spiritualism

at her ownership and use: it is THE table she used. This specificity means that most other elements of its history are superseded by this required association.

These objects are signified by what I describe as a contiguity point.¹³ In the “Leather Funnel” this contiguity point allowed dream-like time travel to the moment at which the object was signified: it was as though the object had been frozen at that moment of “paroxysm”. In the example of the Jane Austen table, that moment is reasonably arbitrary, as even during her life, anyone might have used the table. However, such contiguity points provide something to fix on. In the biographical object, the source of signification (the contiguity point) needs to be carefully cultivated and protected in order for the object to fulfil the contact desired with the subject.

The material provenance discussed above requires visible signs of the life the object has had between the contiguity point and its present display. However, the importance of the contiguity point means that the object’s life between that moment and the present can be a problem. The table shows the marks of use but, because it had been in the possession of a servant for many years, something which contributes to the provenance, the access we have through it to the contiguity points may have been diluted, or contaminated. Whilst the patina on the biographical object can be a sign of its connection to the subject, in all likelihood there are also traces of every other pair of hands the object has passed through. The chain of connection that authenticates also contaminates the object’s contiguity.

The particularity of an object’s significance, both biographically and historically, through both contiguity point and material provenance, needs to be protected, or preserved. One of the signs that the historic sensibility had made its way into the twentieth century, alongside biographical display, is the preoccupation with object stasis, or arrested decay. In the modern preservation of objects, patina must be preserved, but decay arrested. In the historic houses of the late-twentieth century, societies such as The National Trust advocate policies of conservation over restoration, arrested decay or maintaining condition: for example, vacuuming away of the dust deposited by visitors, whilst maintaining ‘historic dust’ (*Big Spring Clean*, 2011).¹⁴ Some dirt and tarnish remain part of the object’s history. Arrested decay is an attempt to remain as associated with the contiguity point as possible; a further example of longing for, and desire to hold, onto the past (particular origins) in the historical sensibility.

Ideally the object would be frozen (or fossilized) at the last moment of contact; it will have passed straight from this origin to the present, untouched by any other hand, with the subject’s traces remaining fresh. If an object such as Austen’s table had been stopped at its contiguity with its owner, then it would retain an uncorrupted quality of past-ness in the object and/or place. In real terms, the fossilized object is probably impossible. However, when the object or

¹³ The notion of contiguity in the biographical object and the relic was discussed in the introduction.

¹⁴ Although, presenter and art historian Andrew Graham-Dixon states that as a work of art he would like to see the table restored to the glory of its early years (gleaming brass work) (*Big Spring Clean*, 2011)



Figure 2 - Watt's Workshop, Science Museum, London. Photograph: Caroline Morris

place (the origin) appears to be sealed off directly after the source event until the present, the impression of uncorrupted past-ness remains. For example, the workshop of the eighteenth century engineer James Watt was left untouched after his death in 1819 until 1924. During that time, the house was inhabited by other families but the workshop remained as Watt had left it. Some visitors came to see the room, commenting that the dust lay so thickly that it felt like “soft snow”, with objects strewn across surfaces as if just used (Watts, 2011). In 1924, the room was carefully dismantled and reconstructed in the Science Museum in London where visitors could look at the room through a window. Ironically, by the 1970s, it was ignored and, during the 1990s, boarded up until 2011 when it became the centrepiece of an exhibition about Watt. The workshop is now a permanent display, contained within its own room, reconstructed behind glass with projections of Watt's works on the walls above the objects (see Figures 2 and 3).

The Watt workshop had been closed off shortly after its user's death and its objects fossilized in dust for 105 years, at which time it was transposed as it was into an exhibition. On the one hand, this workshop is an ideal of biographical display. The objects were shut off at the point of last contact, there has been limited interference from contaminating hands and the provenance is assured thanks to their sequestration. The aesthetic decay is present in the objects but preservation is assured through their arrested decay. Even the layers of dust gave the original display the assurance of authenticity. Yet, on the other hand, this sense of stasis



Figure 3 - Watt's Workshop, Science Museum, London. Photograph: Caroline Morris

and uncorrupted contiguity is illusory. The objects in the room only have the appearance of being untouched but they have been moved and, certainly in the intervening years, been conserved to arrest decay. Despite this, once the object is under the bell jar of museum display, we are encouraged to view its decay as halted, its contamination prevented. In this way, museums can provide the viewer with a sense of temporal mobility (like the “Leather Funnel”). Either the object would draw the past into the present or give an impression that the viewer might reach back in time through the object, connected through that uncorrupted touch: having the same experience of those first discoverers in 1924.

The conceit of much biographical display is that the subject's space is preserved as it was from the moment they left it or the object preserved as though it has only just left their hands. To step into a room that gives the appearance of having been locked at the point of the subject's departure and left untouched for generations is frequently likened to stepping back in time. A sense of uncorrupted and direct contact with the past through its objects is desired and period room curation encourages this impression. It uses the contiguity point, the sequestration of objects and the storage of the past. The period room was discussed briefly in the previous chapter in relation to narrative displays and will be expanded upon in Chapter Three. It is a form of curation which seems created to satisfy the historical sensibility. It contrives to display a room, or house, as if time had stopped, encouraging this sense of



Figure 4 - Darwin's Study, 1932 reconstruction. Wellcome Library, London

stepping back in time. In the limited writing about the period room¹⁵ certain themes, which are also reflected in the historical sensibility, appear: authenticity, preservation and the choice of particular historical moments for display.

...the period room relies so heavily on the notion of authenticity, of being a re-presentation of 'how things really were', it could be argued that the curatorial hands of its authorship are rendered somewhat invisible to the viewer and that spectators looking on the period room understand only as a hermetically sealed capsule, uncontaminated by the passage of time. (Keeble, 2006, p. 2)

Therefore, it is perhaps unsurprising that the period room is the preferred means of displaying the biographical object.

In reconstructing rooms that give the appearance of frozen time, whether purposely or not, these museums giving the impression of authenticity, of a return to the contiguity point. However, as I have suggested, the stasis and frozen moment are illusory. Darwin's study, for example, is reconstructed to look as though he had just stepped out of the room. It has been constructed as a study since the house was opened to the public (1929). However, its curation has altered over the course of its display. The curation is based upon photographs taken during the 1870s (see Figure 4 and 5) (Reeve, 2009, p. 8). The room is a snap shot of Darwin's life, a facsimile based upon a single photographic moment. It is a scene frozen, and certainly

¹⁵ Something Trevor Keeble begins with in his introduction to *Modern Period Room* (Keeble, 2006)



Figure 5 - Darwin's study from the English Heritage Interactive site 2009 – reproduced by permission of Historic England.

tidied up, at a particular point of time in Darwin's life. Its origin lies in an arbitrary moment in time, a single contiguity point. As a facsimile or reproduction, it can lack a sense of historical or biographical authenticity. The irony of this three-dimensional facsimile, based upon a photograph, is that that same photograph authenticates the replica. Further, the use of original objects lends the space authenticity and partially reduces this problem, as mentioned in relation to Elgar and Freud earlier. Darwin objects, which have that material provenance of long use, radiate authenticity into their display site, which itself radiates his long habitation. The facsimile frozen moment is validated, through "structures of transference", by the authentic object. Like consecration, the authenticity of these possessions and the building itself, permeates the facsimile and counteracts any pretence.

Objects viewed through the Romantic eye of the historical sensibility are endowed with a particular quality associated with their past. Such is this quality that objects both appear porous to their past and radiate that past to their surroundings, mirroring forms of consecration used in the relic, and offering a further connection to those practices but in a nineteenth-century context. At the same time, the contiguity point can dominate an object's signification, freezing that object at that moment, something used in the display of biographical objects. The trope of the sealed room left sequestered until the present is one that appears in multiple biographical displays, especially those in former homes. This allows for a more affective sense of connection with the subject because the touch of the subject appears to be frozen at the

moment of contact. Both duration and contiguity point are integral parts of the signification and interpretation of biographical objects. In the next section, this will be considered more closely in relation to the biographical subject's creative or mental labour; it will draw the Romantic notion of genius into the inscription of biographical objects and locations.

Paroxysms of Genius: Evoking Creative and Mental Labour in Biographical Display

The first section of this chapter focused upon the Romantic sensibility and the cult of genius that originated from it; the second section upon the way that objects seemed porous to the past, but also capable of emitting that stored up past. This final section considers how these two nineteenth-century perspectives lie at the foundation of biographical object practice and how this might explain the museum's focus upon the biographical subject's productive life. The preference for objects and places that had been witness to the creative or mental labour of the biographical museum's subject (or the activity for which they are celebrated) became clear early in this research. Most obviously, in the way the particular location of creative labours has become the primary location for reconstruction and preservation.

The historical sensibility and the cult of genius come together in the biographical museum's focus on the working life of the subject¹⁶ and its signs on associated objects. The importance placed upon decay in relation to the historical object or building, in the biographical museum, becomes a source of signification for the object through the wear and tear caused by the biographical subject. This wear and tear becomes evocative of the subject at work and those objects and locations become irrevocably identified with the activity for which that subject is remembered. This becomes a further means for the readers/viewers to go beyond the subject's work; they can look for signs of the effort, the moments of inspiration that written biographies describe and at which their works hint. That is, they are invited to see the objects and locations of creative and mental labour, to visit the lonely garrets vacated by the tortured artist or writer and to identify material traces of genius. This more specific sensibility is examined first through the handwritten manuscript (sometimes described as a holograph or autograph) and then through the object's association with mental labour. This section will conclude with a consideration of the study as a dominant display trope in biographical object display.

The most abundant examples of Darwin objects are handwritten: notebooks, manuscripts and letters. The letters alone are said to run to 14,500,¹⁷ archived in collections across the

¹⁶ The focus upon the subject's life, behind the work, is the subject of Chapter Three.

¹⁷ <http://www.darwinproject.ac.uk/>

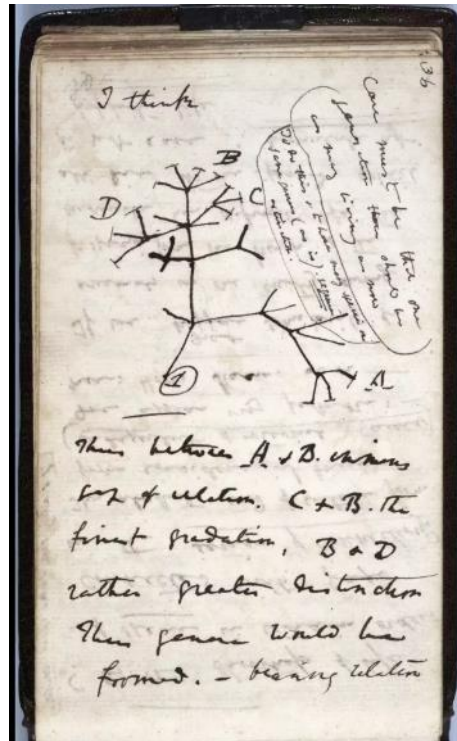


Figure 6 - Darwin's Notebook B – reproduced by kind permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library

world. Like other biographical subjects, documentation in Darwin's own hand provides his biographers with material for their texts; and it is from these textual fragments that his life can be pieced together, giving background to the work for which he is best known as well as showing the building blocks of his theories. However, in the context of this chapter, documents like these can be viewed as one type of biographical object which might also illuminate other types. Despite being frequently reproduced in printed form, original manuscripts transcend their textual content and become visually and tangibly evocative. The ways in which they can become evocative for the viewer refer back to both the past as material residue and decay as a signifier of objects whilst establishing the ways that the biographical object can function.

Of the many documents associated with Darwin, perhaps the most evocative of the scientist at work might be his notebooks, which he kept assiduously. The most important of these notebooks, missing from Down House, were those in which he worked out his theories of natural selection. Of these, it is Notebook B that is most often referred to and reproduced (Figure 6). Desmond and Moore open a chapter of their biography of Darwin by describing a particular moment of July 1837, when he first opened what they call his "clandestine transmutation notebook" (Desmond and Moore, 2009, p. 229).

It is a small leather bound notebook. The page edges are now foxed with age and use. The contents of the notebook are pen and ink writing and diagrams. The notebook is preserved in the Cambridge University Library. The page that draws the most attention in Notebook B is one on which an angular tree-like structure is drawn with letters on several of its branches and

at the top the simple statement, “I Think”, along with some other notations. These things in themselves are unremarkable until one considers that the diagram is Darwin’s first tentative attempt to explain his theory of natural selection. With this knowledge, Notebook B is transformed into a significant artefact. As a manuscript, the theory is literally inscribed onto it. As an object, rather than just a vehicle for his text, it was present at the conception of the idea; it is both witness to and evidence of it. It is also capable of conveying his thinking and working processes. Desmond and Moore go on to describe what Darwin did once he had opened this, then, fresh notebook: “He then burst into a continuous series of notes covering twenty-seven or so pages, a breathless machine-gun like effusion of telegraphic jottings, representing hurried and excited trains of thought...” (Desmond and Moore, 2009, p. 229). As a cork let out of a bottle, his pent-up ideas flowed out in profusion. He called this machine-gun-like writing ‘mental rioting’ (Desmond and Moore, 2009, p. 240). A hand-written manuscript such as this evokes its past and, therefore, its author in two different ways: firstly, in its marginalia and, secondly, in its material authenticity (the latter having been the subject of the second section of this chapter). It will become clear that these two forms of signification become interrelated in the biographical object.

The marginalia of a handwritten document such as the notebook offer insight beyond the basic textual content. The word marginalia has come to refer to a reader’s annotations made in the margins of a book rather than authors’ annotations of their own manuscript. It can also refer to notes, commentary, and similar material written or printed in the margin of a book or manuscript which can be incidental or additional to the main topic. I chose to use marginalia to refer to both notes (and diagrams in the case of Notebook B) and, more specifically, the erasures, errors, amendments, incidental marks and fluctuations in writing style. If marginalia act as commentary in addition to the main text, then the edits and incidental marks can become commentary on both the text and the writer. They can be interpreted by biographers like Desmond and Moore, for insight into writing process and, by extension, the subject’s life. As mentioned in the first section, the subjects’ lives (especially writers’ lives) became an extension of their own work and the work an extension of the subject (part of their biography). In order for the reader to go beyond the works, and get to their creator, they must read between the lines. In the marginalia, especially the incidentals, the reader moves beyond the work in pursuit of its creator: literally, reading between the lines.

Figure 7 shows a manuscript page from Elgar’s *Cello Concerto in E minor*. If one picks up a copy of the printed score, it will communicate the correct melody, time and key signatures, incidentals, dynamics and suggested musical emotion. However, a manuscript page from the concerto could tell us much more if it is looked for. His handwriting is careful in some places and scrawling in others. The carefully drawn stave lines are dotted with notes and swept over by later thought.¹⁸ There are multiple crossings out in both pen and pencil, the depth of the

¹⁸ The stave lines were drawn by his wife, by hand, using a special pen now displayed in the Birthplace study

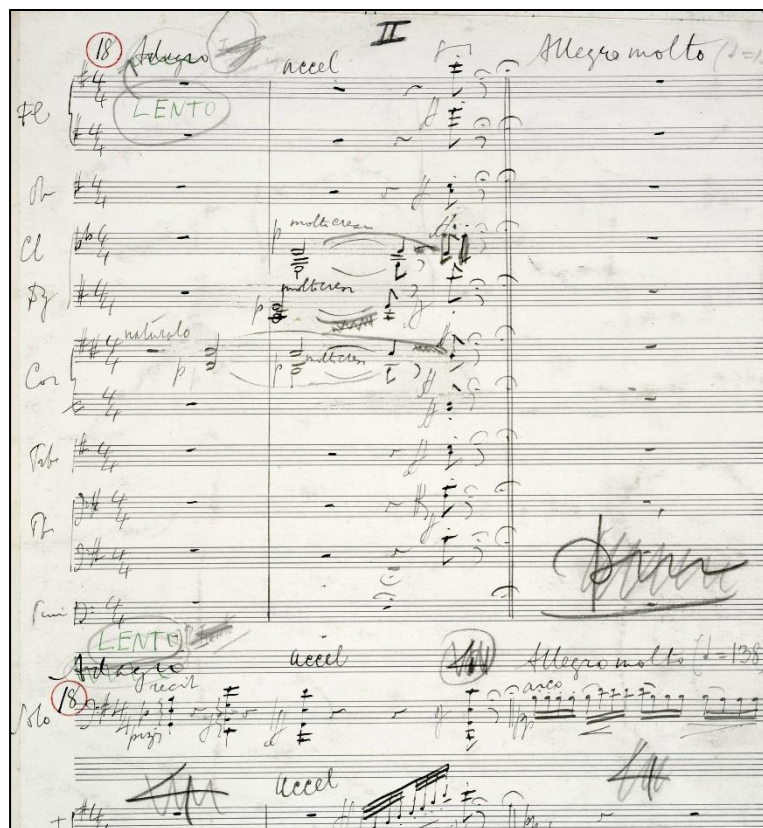


Figure 7 - Manuscript of Elgar's cello concerto ©Royal College of Music / ArenaPAL

colour showing the strength of the pencil stroke that erased them. These incidental, off the cuff, unintentional marks are left out of the printed text, along with accents, intonations and inadvertent gestures. Seeing the quality of the writing can reveal the character or mood in which he was writing, the more scrawled, the more intense the experience of his creating. The crossing out of words or notes would tell the reader something of the thought processes or writing processes.¹⁹ For example, Elgar crossed out *adagio* and replaced it with *lento*, slowing the tempo further than originally planned. Tracing smudges, inkblots, mistakes and corrections may seem to show the subject thinking, breathing or fidgeting. The subject comes alive in such incidentals, such is their evocative quality.

An example of the evocative nature of the original handwritten manuscript, and its affect is clear in a moment in a BBC Radio Four documentary about the unfinished Dickens novel *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (2012). In this programme, crime writers Frances Fyfield and Simon Brett and Dickens scholar Professor Jenny Hartley examine the original manuscript stored in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London. Examining the final pages of this unfinished work, they looked for evidence of how Dickens wrote, whether he corrected as he went along or edited later. They observed the messiness of the scripts; his corrections in different coloured

¹⁹ Cornelia Parker made a series of photographs of erasures made to an original manuscript of *Jane Eyre* (Parker, 2006)

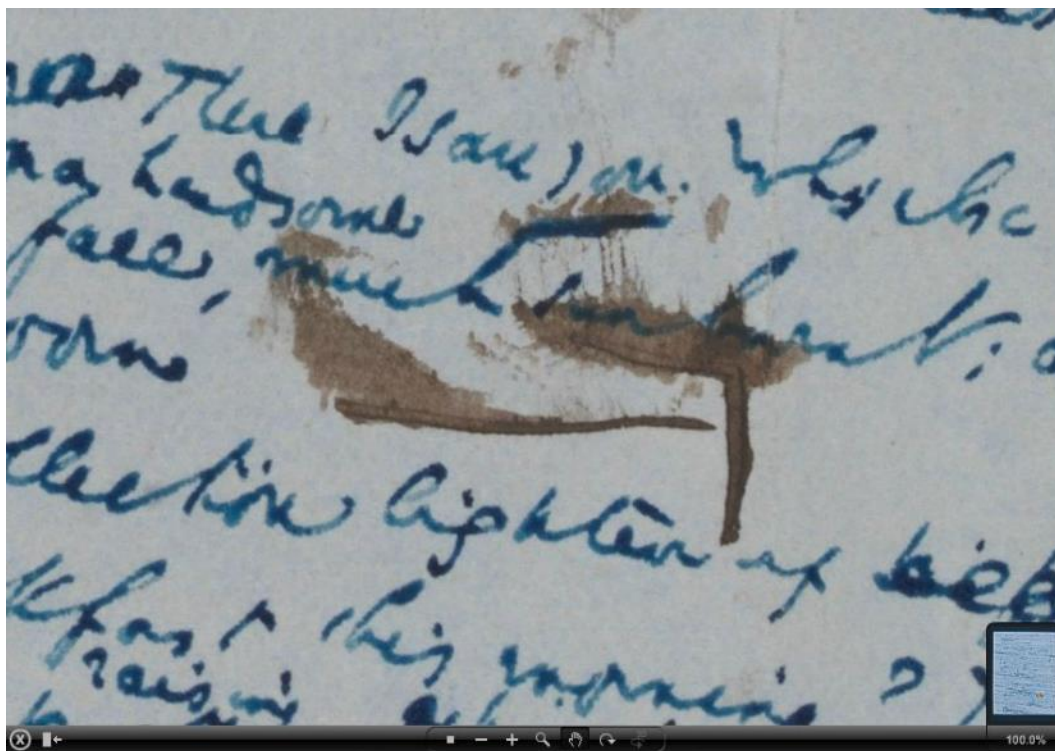


Figure 8 - Screenshot of page of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* manuscript – © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

inks. The most telling moment came when Frances Fyfield pointed out what looked like a coffee stain (Figure 8), and the scholar exclaimed “oh fantastic...oh that’s so moving isn’t it...I’ve never seen anything like that before it’s so moving isn’t it...” (*The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, 2012). Even for the Dickens academic, the most evocative aspect of this manuscript became not the author’s words but the clumsy placing of an over-spilling cup on the manuscript page. This becomes a sign enabling the reader, as Frances Fyfield put it, to try “to get in touch with the author” and it enabled them to speculate on the circumstances that had led to the stain. From an accidental mark on the Dickens’ final manuscript, these readers were able to conjure the moment of its creation.

In his autobiography of 1942, Austrian novelist/journalist Stefan Zweig nicely encapsulates the idea while describing his experience of accessing certain original manuscripts.²⁰

I wanted the original manuscripts or drafts of written works or musical compositions because, more than anything else, I was interested in the biographical and psychological aspects of the creation of a work of art. Where else can we locate that mysterious moment of transition when the vision and intuition of a genius brings a verse or a melody out of invisibility into the earthly realm, giving it graphic form, where can we observe it if not in the first drafts of creative artists, whether achieved with great effort or set down as if in a trance? ... I agree with Goethe who said that, to understand great works fully, we should not just look at them in their final form but trace the course of their

²⁰ This book was described at the time of its reissue as encapsulating “what it meant to be alive between 1881 and 1942” - theguardian.com/books/2009/dec/05/world-yesterday-stefan-zweig-review

creation...A page of a proof corrected by Balzac, where almost every sentence is torn apart, every line ploughed up, the white margins invaded by black lines, markings and words, symbolises to me the eruption of a human Vesuvius, and when I first see a poem that I have loved for decades in its original draft, its first earthly form, I am moved by a religious sense of awe; I hardly dare to touch it (Zweig, 2009, p. L2414) ²¹

Encapsulated in this passage are the foundations of the biographical object, whether textual or material: the need for the original or the holograph; the biographical viewed in the works; the genius at work; the discovery of the process of a work's creation through its traces; the quasi 'religious sense of awe' in the presence of such manuscripts. Such marginalia and erasures give the manuscript the past-ness it needs to be evocative of the subject. Just as decay provides the historical object with a sense that it has lived, so the marginalia and erasures give the manuscripts a sense of the process of writing. They also provide the reader to go beyond the basic text and read the document as a record of how it was written. The written incidents and accidental marks, the marginalia, have become extensions not only of the subject's work, but also of the subject. They are the traces of their creative and mental labours.

The sense of the subject that comes from the marginalia of the original manuscript is equally applied to the other material fragments of a subject's life. As such, one way of viewing the biographical object would be as a form of material marginalia. Consider the image in Figure



Figure 9 - Close up of Austen's Table. Photograph: Caroline Morris

²¹ A page later Zweig goes on to describe his own personal museum of objects including Beethoven's desk and Goethe's quill pen (Zweig, 2009, p. L2439).

9 as a holograph, as a written manuscript by its owner. Although we cannot absolutely know that the marks and wear were directly created by Jane Austen, some of the marks can be attributed to her even if they cannot be precisely identified. The activity of writing at this desk inscribed the surface. The evocative blots and smudges of the manuscript translate to signs of use or everyday wear and tear on the objects that surrounded the subject during their creative lives. The creative and mental labour of the biographical subject is evoked in the blots and smudges and also in the material wear and tear on the object's that surrounded the subject at work. They bear the impress of those who have used them and show the wear of repeated use; wear that is made significant by the association. Such marks enable a sense of being in touch with the author at work. They are the unexpected insights that can entice the viewer and could be the cause of a scholar's excited exclamation about being moved by something as incidental as a coffee ring. In the biographical object, the wear produced in the process of creative endeavour is a combination of regular handling and the association with the 'Great Work'. They gain aura through their handling by the creative subject: "...the marks of the potter's hand." (Benjamin, 1999d, p. 156). This objects patina can be viewed as what remains of creative and mental effort, just as the marginalia is associated with the creative process. The influence of the Romantic sensibility is clear in this focus upon the creative process and the interest in the creator, beyond the product itself.

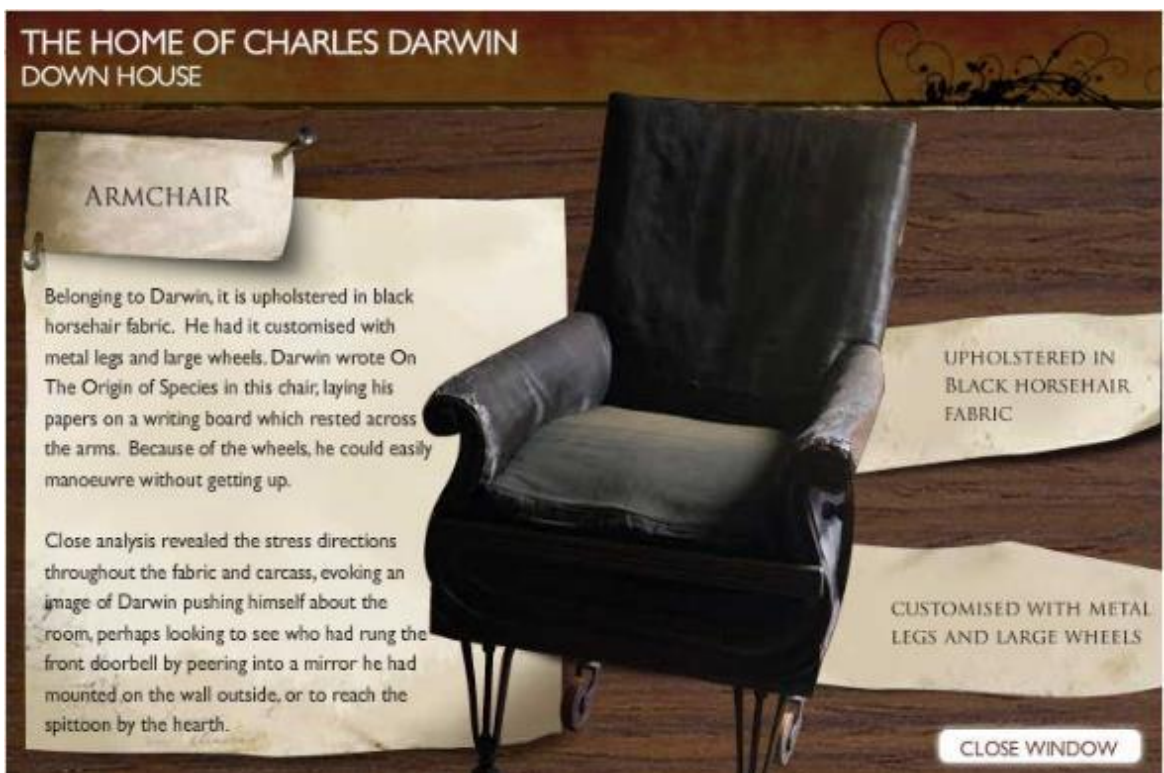


Figure 10 - Screenshot of interactive Down House site.
<http://english-heritage.org.uk/Darwin2009> - reproduced by permission of Historic England.

Darwin's chair²² for example (Figure 10): the chair dominates his study in Down House, Kent. Darwin all but lived in this specially adapted chair. It is now curated, pulled out from the study table. Darwin's activities in this study are evoked through this furniture and its wear. This significance was used by English Heritage, the house's custodians, who highlighted the chair on their temporary interactive site during 2009. Their text drew the visitor's attention to the upholstery and the fact that "close analysis revealed the stress directions throughout the fabric and carcass, evoking an image of Darwin pushing himself about the room..." (English Heritage, 2009). It is evocative of his habits but the wear on chair's arms is perhaps more evocative of his mental efforts. He rested a plain wooden board on the chair's arms as a surface upon which to write.²³ The visible heavy wear on the chair's arms is directly related to this writing board rubbing its surface. The movement of the board can be connected to the movement of his hand as he wrote.

Perhaps only in the creative location does the worn carpet or torn upholstery become a sign of creative or mental endeavour. The Romantics had aesthetically appreciated the ruin for marks or signs of its age and this was later called "pleasing decay" by artist John Piper (Piper, 1947).²⁴ For the biographical object, I more specifically term such appreciated wear as 'associative decay': the wear created by the object's use by the subject, especially when connected to the creative process. More than that, this decay may also be termed, in some circumstances, 'evocative decay'. The wear, like the coffee stain, is evocative to the viewer/reader of the subject's (especially creative) activities. Two worn tracks of carpet in front of the desk can be changed from a cause for restoration or replacement to having the potential to evoke an image of the subject pulling the chair out before sitting ready for a session of work.

The signs of wear are clearly visible signs that can be interpreted as indications of the creative labours. However, there are biographical objects that do not carry visible signs of use but carry associations with the labours of their owner: objects which surround the subject, influence, and are influenced by, the act of daily creation. For some visitors the ornaments with which a subject surround themselves are evocative. They create the environment in which inspiration occurs. In her essay, "On Stuff", Clare Pettit is moved by the small porcelain monkey which Charles Dickens always had on his desk (Figure 11), and imagines him fingering it or glaring at it when his writing wasn't going well (Pettit, 2008, p. 1). However, this type of object rarely shows the wear of such touch and, certainly, no evidence of glaring. In this instance, the object can be guessed to have inspired or consoled during the creative

²² Freud's chair was similarly unique in manufacture and in the traces of its long use.

²³ This was also the practice of the children's author Roald Dahl (BBC, 2011; Crown, 2011).

²⁴ It is interesting to note that pleasing decay for the Romantics differed from their Twentieth Century descendants. The ruins that attracted the Romantics, by their decayed state, were cleaned up by the Ministry of Works in the Twentieth Century. Ruins are now carefully shored up, and surrounded by immaculately mown lawns, rather than being the vegetation covered places of the Romantics (Thurley, 2013, p. 140). Our ruins are thoroughly domesticated.



Figure 11 - Dickens' china Monkey. Photograph: Caroline Morris

process, but does not clearly show associative decay (although in the crevices of its neck, it may harbour historic dust).

There may be two combined processes at work in the evocative qualities of biographical objects like these which still retain associations with their owner. On the one hand, the object may retain the 'memory' of its owner in the way the "Mystic Writing-Pad" retained previous marks. The object is like the wax layer beneath the paper surface of the notepad that retains the impress of the past apparently erased when the paper is lifted. The association the monkey has with Dickens is present but hidden beneath the only lightly marked surface. On the other hand, there is a sense that similar processes to the structures of transference, discussed in the second section, may be at play.

However, the reason that this handling of (usually) everyday objects further develops auratic hold and evocative power is a combination of two things; display and location. The significance placed upon both the handwritten products of the subject's mental labours and the material marginalia that facilitate it have meant that the locations of such labours have become equally significant. This is perhaps unsurprising when one remembers how the Romantic sensibility prompted not only the cult of genius but also the literary pilgrimage to places most associated with the revered works, an impulse that has expanded beyond the literary into the subject from other fields. Place and genius are also linked by the *genius loci*, where the people of a place are infused, or inspired by, the essence, or unique nature, of a

place. In this context, the word genius became an essence unique to the individual but originating in place.

The biographical display's most frequently reconstructed location, the study, draws heavily on the cult of the genius. Darwin's study, for example, has been a display using a reconstruction since its opening, the rest of the ground floor not being reconstructed until the 1990's. This shows the importance placed on the study even from the outset of its preservation, and exposure to the public. Cultural adulation of the subject is the foundation of the biographical displays power to evoke through the sites and objects directly associated with a 'great works' creation. The place of creation is the most important type of memorial for the biographical museum. Nicola Watson calls these houses "workshops of genius" (Watson, 2006, p. 90). These are sites where the products for which the subject was most associated were created. The dominance of these forms of house museum shows the draw of places and objects associated with the birth of great works.

The biographical display has made the combination of this kind of site and associated material marginalia into its primary focus. In some cases, the study is the most carefully reconstructed room in the associated museum (the Freud Museum, for example); although in more recent decades, the remaining parts of the house have also had this treatment (examined further in Chapter Three). Preferred working sites, reconstructed as they would have been in their subject's lifetime, are displayed in the homes of figures such as George Bernard Shaw, Benjamin Disraeli, Sigmund Freud, Charles Dickens, Lord Byron and Rudyard Kipling. Even when the reconstructed study is excised from its former home, and placed in a more general museum, similar processes are at work. There are one-room reconstruction displays of the working places of figures such as Arthur Ransome in the Museum of Lakeland Life, Thomas Hardy in Dorchester Museum, Marcel Proust in the Musée Carnavalet, Paris, and Charles Darwin in the Natural History Museum.

In each of these examples, similar tropes are in use, which reiterate both the historical sensibility's love of evocative decay and the peculiarities of the cult of genius. The curation of objects, as if in use, highlights specific wear that is related to the creative process: a chair pulled out from a desk as though someone had just risen from working, which draws attention to the seat, or any marks on the floor.²⁵ In this way, the viewer is able to associate the wear with a particular activity. As discussed in Section Two of this chapter, traces of the past are signified by both time and particular moments. There are two forms of creation that can be embedded within the workshop of genius. In the context of the genius at work, they can be described as creative labour and the eureka. They are both aspects of the cult of genius: the tortured artist in the garret versus the quasi-miraculous flash of inspiration.

²⁵ The curation of subject's homes as if still in use is examined further in Chapter Three and Four.

Creative labour as has been discussed lies in the traces of use that are associated with the creative process. In the reconstructed study or workshop of genius, these traces stand for the slow burn of ideas, the struggle of the great thinker at work: for example, the way that Charles Darwin wrestled with his theories of evolution which would shake up society and threatened to undermine his wife's devout beliefs. These results of his theories troubled him and this struggle was made manifest in debilitating ailments which are physicalized by adaptations made to the chair (Desmond and Moore, 2009; English Heritage, 2009; Keynes, 2009; Reeve, 2009; Stott, 2003). In this way, he has come to resemble the scientist as the epitome of the tortured, isolated writer. The imprinting of this creative struggle is not confined to Darwin. Other studies reflect the struggles of their subjects in various ways. For some, Freud's study becomes a reflection of his unconscious mind (Goldhill, 2011); Proust's bedroom (the primary work site and reconstructed in a Paris museum) becomes a reflection of his inner self (Foschini, 2011).

When associated with this kind of creative struggle, long habit impresses on the objects and site in which it has occurred. The structures of transference mentioned in section two in effect allow an 'authentic' object to consecrate/authenticate its surroundings with its past-ness. In the study, the presence of the struggling genius similarly transfers onto the objects and places being used; the infusion of genius and place works both ways. The creative subject is infused or inspired with the essence of place but, in return, the place is infused with the essence of that creative act. As the 1811 journalist, mentioned at the end of section one, wrote; "Genius, or, more properly, inspiration, dignifies every spot on which its energies have been elicited..." (Fara, 2003, p. 231). The preservation, and subsequent appeal of the associative house, especially the reconstructed study, comes from this idea of the consecrating genius and its close cousin the idea of the tortured writer or artist in a lonely garret.

This notion of the genius as dignifying every spot returns us to Doyle's story of the "Leather Funnel" where one of the characters believed that objects associated with "paroxysms" of emotion retain a certain communicable "atmosphere or association" (Doyle, 1902, p. L31868). Paroxysms of emotion translate into the 'genius at work' or 'the eureka moment'. Yet the paroxysms of genius are also created through the other aspect of the cult of genius and the other signifying factor in the displayed study lies in the notion of the sudden moment of inspiration. "Part of the pull of a writer's house is the desire to get close as possible to the precise, generative, Aha!" (Trubek, 2011, p. 5). Trubek's "generative Aha", like Archimedes Eureka, is a paroxysm of creation whose residues are impressed upon the objects that were either used for or associated with that moment. The object and the house are the tangible reminders of a "generative Aha!" that are otherwise only legible through marginalia on manuscripts.

The idea of the sudden moment of inspiration is almost certainly a seductive myth, coming out of the cult of genius, as is the connected idea of an object or site's contiguity point which can freeze the association at that point. The notion of the "generative Aha!" can become a dominant narrative not only of a subject's biography but also of their biographical display. Both James Watt and Isaac Newton have famous eureka moments associated with them, both of which are almost certainly myths. The popular story associated with James Watt is that he had his idea for a steam engine having watched a kettle boil over forcing its lid off (Miller, 2004). Likewise, Newton is popularly thought to have had the idea of gravity when he saw an apple fall from a tree (Fara, 2003). In both instances, the stories cannot be verified and have developed over time in such a way that they could be described as myths of the 'eureka moment'. The latter example in particular is forever associated with Woolsthorpe Manor, Newton's home and now museum. The idea of the moment of inspiration, eureka, or "Aha!", is closely associated with the quasi-religious experience, which is viewed as being able to dignify every spot or consecrate the places and objects associated with it.

Today, there is almost an expectation that the places and objects used by celebrated figures in their creative work should be preserved and displayed together. This expectation shows how this kind of biographically associative memorial has become an established phenomenon and, therefore, how the remnants of a Romantic/historical sensibility are still apparent. The Romantic and historical sensibility has informed not only the value placed upon an object (or house) but also the way that it will be preserved, displayed and read. Only when the reader/viewer seeks to look beyond the admired work/activity to the process of its creation, and therefore its creator, can the biographical object and its display exist. Further, only when the past is viewed as being present in its remains, and more that when objects retain a particular quality of past-ness, can the admiring viewer look to the biographical object for a kind of connection.

There is a sense that this quality can be transferred, to confer its past-ness on other objects. In this sense, the objects of the historical sensibility are analogous to the relic in their ability to radiate their quality, like consecration. The past becomes something of value, which in its materiality could be lost or corrupted, and then becomes something to be protected, preserved as culturally important. The object must be allowed to tell the story of its past through its traces but also have time arrested in order to protect its valuable contiguity point. The reconstruction of spaces as if still being used by the subject, using their objects, facilitates this. It gives the viewer the possibility of seeing material expressions of both the subject labouring to produce the admired work and to be present with objects that have witnessed the eureka, the paroxysm of creativity.

The expectation that visitors/viewers can access the something of the process of the subject's creation, and by extension a sense of past-ness and cultural origins, means that

those objects/sites not saved become in need of rescue. Outrage follows should the site of a noted figure's creative endeavours be threatened. For example, the furore over Conan Doyle's house Undershaw continues: the site where he wrote *Hound of the Baskervilles* (1901) is virtually derelict and, when threatened with conversion by developers, incited the formation of a campaign to save the building and turn it into a Conan Doyle centre.²⁶ In the last year, the homes where the creative labours of both William Blake and JMW Turner took place have been 'saved for the nation'. When these sites are ready for visitors, based upon the contemporary norm surveyed, it could be predicted that they will include a reconstructed creative location. The study or workshop will have the chair pulled out from its desk; papers will be strewn on the desk's surface; some ornaments will adorn it; and very frequently, a pair of spectacles will be positioned on those papers as though the subject has just left the room. However, this modern biographical display is not necessarily the image of a tortured creative mind at work from which it derives. It shows what this Romantic genius in their garret image has evolved into: a Victorian/Edwardian man's study, something that has become the dominant trope of the notable individual at work. In the next chapter, the particular tropes of biographical object display in associated sites will be examined further to consider how living spaces became sites for discovering the life behind the work of their owners.

²⁶ As of 2016, a plan has been put forward for the building to be turned into a school for children with learning difficulties.

Chapter 3

At Home in the Biographical Museum: the Home as an Expression of the Self, and its Reconstruction as a Museum

The last chapter began to examine the way that objects become intrinsically associated with their former owners and the relationship between object and display site. It considered associative narratives created by the biographical subject's creative labours; focusing on sites of creativity with some consideration of sites that were represented in the work (illustrative sites). It showed the importance of an association with the subject's creative labours in the signification of a house, creating the necessary conditions for a museum's foundation.

However, my survey of biographical object display showed that former homes are the preferred sites for such displays in combination with reconstructions of the subject's former homes. Indeed, many museums make a point of stating the length of time their subject had lived in the house: for example, Charles Darwin's forty-year association with Down House; the Brontë sisters lived in the Haworth Parsonage for forty years; Beatrix Potter was living in and around Hilltop house for thirty-eight years; George Bernard Shaw lived at Shaw's Corner for forty-four years. Therefore, the home, and the subject's life within it, are clearly important in the creation of the biographical museum. This is a form of signification of objects and sites which is based on the life of the subject rather than the works. Therefore, it is distinct from the cult of genius and the fetishization of the process of creativity. Although in many cases these homes are also creative and illustrative sites, the importance placed upon long habitation in the signification of the home as a museum and the increasing preference for the reconstruction of subjects' domestic environment, is the subject of this chapter.

The focus on the everyday life of the subject is founded upon the notion that to understand the way people live is an important way of knowing them. We can know the subject through current biographies about them, which are interested in their daily life, as much as their 'great deeds'. If we were to travel back in time to pay a call on them, we might be able to know them through their homes which reflect and carry the traces of those daily lives. It is the combination of biographical detail and the home's interiors, recreated as period rooms within their former dwellings, which can give the impression that we will be able to know them. The recreated rooms we are able to see are not just the workspaces of the

subjects but, increasingly, other living spaces like drawing rooms, dining rooms, kitchens and bedrooms. For example, a major renovation of Down House occurred during the 1990's when three ground floor rooms were changed from the vitrined exhibition rooms into reconstructed living spaces. Similarly, the recent refurbishment of the Dickens museum in London saw the reconstruction of additional domestic interiors, including bedrooms, kitchen and dining room. In both of these instances, the museum statements affirm the importance they place on giving the visitor the sense of the subject at home.

English Heritage, which cares for Down House and several other biographical museums, incorporate the importance of home in their *Conservation Principles* which carefully defines, what it calls, associative historical value.¹

Association with a notable family, person, event, or movement gives historical value a particular resonance... The way in which an individual built or furnished their house, or made a garden, often provides insight into their personality, or demonstrates their political or cultural affiliations. It can suggest aspects of their character and motivation that extend, or even contradict, what they or others wrote, or are recorded as having said, at the time, and so also provide evidential value. (English Heritage, 2008, p. 29)

This statement of association value can equally be applied to the many non-English Heritage house museums. The word "insight" implies that they are a means of apprehending the true nature of their owner; a means of seeing the inner character of their subject. It prompts the question, how the home offers insight into personality and extends what is known about the subject. It implies that the home allows the visitor to see what may have remained hidden, getting closer to the subject, or getting to know them better. In order to examine the signification of the home created by long habitation and the insights offered by the reconstructed home, this chapter begins by considering both the influence of biography and particular notions of the home coming from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Biography is a narrator of lives. Biographical practices have directly influenced the display practices of associative sites by providing the facts of the subject's life in association with information from descendants. A subtler influence has come from shifts in emphasis in biography practices. In the late nineteenth century, under the influence of psychoanalysis, this shifted again away from the deeds of great men to begin to examine all aspects of a person's life and interpret them in the context of their time. It is this later shift in focus to the personal life that introduces this notion of extending our knowledge of the subject. The personal life of the biographical subject had previously been considered irrelevant to the life history of the great subject. However, this shift in emphasis meant the inclusion of anecdotes of daily life, offering insight and a more intimate knowledge of the subject.

¹ English Heritage's heritage values are divided into evidential, aesthetic, communal and historical. The latter value they subdivide into illustrative historical value and associative historical value (English Heritage, 2008).

The home was a location where visitors could also expect to gain insight and more intimate knowledge of their subject (host). The particularity of one person's home over another's can be described through the decoration, the type and arrangement of objects with which the home is filled and the signs that the objects have been used and the home lived in. Both décor and trace can describe the inhabitant in different ways, something that they themselves can use to express themselves to their visitors, or decide to conceal. In order to understand the way that the home and its contents become tied to the inhabitant's identity, it is necessary to examine the sense of the home as a retreat and/or as a social identifier that developed over the nineteenth century. In addition, to extend the consideration of wear as a signifier, begun in Chapter Two, and here applied to the signs of everyday living.

The later house museum uses décor and trace to describe the subject they seek to represent, offering insight into the character or personality of their inhabitant, as described in the guiding principles. It does this by recreating rooms in these former homes, as they would have been in their celebrated owner's time, through the use of the period room technique. This chapter will show how the house museums of this research use biographical narrative, and reconstruction, to allow the modern museum visitor to have, as the Dickens Museum in London describe it, "a magical experience of walking through the house which feels as though Dickens has just left it" (Dickens Museum, 2012). It will consider how this is apparent in the museum, specifically through the reconstruction of Darwin's home at Down House, and how long habitation is made evident. It then examines those museums that lack such long habitation and the ways in which they compensate for that using those same tools; through the Dickens House in Doughty Street and, more specifically, the Elgar Birthplace Museum, near Worcester.

The Foundations of the Biographical Museum: How Late Nineteenth-century Notions of Biography and the Home Combined to Create the Modern Biographical Museum

This section will begin to test the notion that these museums can be described as material biographies and, therefore, biographical museums. It will do this initially through a consideration of shifts in written biography practice between the Victorian period and the early twentieth century. It will then move to examine how the domestic interior developed over the century, becoming so closely associated with its dweller that it could describe its inhabitant; and might inadvertently create a form of material autobiography that later provides the house museum with its material biography.

In the practice of life writing, the early twentieth-century period saw the beginning of a shift in perspective away from the preoccupations of the nineteenth century. Victorian life-writing painted its subjects in a very particular manner. Many of the lives it documented were those of great men, society's worthy individuals: in other words, lives that would be morally instructive. Virginia Woolf wrote several essays about the art of life-writing, many of which were critical, but which document the shift in biographic perspective. Woolf was critical of this period's forms of life writing and said that "...the Victorian biographer was dominated by the idea of goodness. Noble, upright, chaste, severe; it is thus that the Victorian worthies are presented to us" (Woolf, 1927, p. 96). The individuals would be feted for public achievements and the narration of their lives was treated respectfully and with reticence. Biographers were expected to be sympathetic but, in effect, they censored aspects of the subject's life. As many of these biographies were written by a descendant or close acquaintance of the subject, they often went beyond sympathy and into veneration (Lee, 2009, p. 58). Biography kept within the family might appear appropriate because a relative would have direct knowledge of their subject, enabling them to accurately portray their relative's life. However, they can jealously guard their memory and either edit out or play down problems, scandals and everyday domestic life that may taint their subject: ignoring childhood, domestic life, vulnerabilities, or any signs of personality (Lee, 2009, p. 63).

The problem for the Victorian biographer was that the personal life was considered irrelevant to the basic facts of a documented life and any intrusion upon that life after death was unacceptable and potentially scandalous. The analogy, which some writers on biography use, is the biographer as a burglar rifling through the drawers of someone's life. This long-standing analogy was used by writer Margaret Oliphant, in her essay "Ethics of Biography", to describe the responsibilities of the biographer.

To bring a great man, who has lived in the common daylight without reproach during his life, to the bar of this world's opinion after his death, is in itself a painful act... the dead have no such safeguard; they have no longer any privacy; their very hearts, like their desks and private drawers and cabinets, can be ransacked for evidence to their disadvantage. (Oliphant, 1883, p. 91)

This summarises the controversies associated with life writing, especially at this time. For nineteenth-century society, it was desirable to keep the private life separate from the public and to write or want to read about a subject's personal life, was analogous to gossip. The subject's life story was removed from their control and to expose the private life was an invasion, a narrative assault upon their memory. This goes some way to explaining the preference for reverent biographies by friends or relatives. Although it is a stretch to call such biographies hagiographies, it does reflect the problem that early twentieth-century writers, like Woolf, would have with these texts. The tactfully censored and discreet biography may be essentially accurate but its omissions undermine it; its authenticity is similarly called into question by those same omissions and by veneration in its writing; being closer to

mythmaking and its only fidelity is to its subject's legacy. The reader is only able to access a particular culturally constructed image of that subject.

This shift in attitude to biographical writing was part of a wider cultural shift at the beginning of the century, influenced by the profound shock of World War One, and the rise of psychoanalysis (discussed further below). The social hierarchies and mores of the Victorians appeared less relevant to the post-war generation. In an essay of 1939, Virginia Woolf describes Victorian biographies as transforming their subjects into effigies.

...the majority of Victorian biographies are like the wax figures now preserved in Westminster Abbey, that were carried in funeral processions through the street — effigies that have only a smooth superficial likeness to the body in the coffin.

...the Victorian age was rich in remarkable figures many of whom had been grossly deformed by the effigies that had been plastered over them. (Woolf, 1939, p. 117)

As morally illustrative representative types, the Victorian biographical subject has had all their particularity erased or at least disguised. The biography becomes a mask which never challenges the memory or legacy of the subject but also has the effect of superficial knowledge of them. If the appeal of the biography is that it allows its reader to gain knowledge about, and an understanding of, the subject then this surface treatment can neither hope to be accurate or authentic.

In the same essay, she also describes the shift that occurred in life writing at the beginning of the twentieth century. This shift can loosely be summarised as a pursuit of truth in life writing. The criticisms she makes of the preceding generation are directly connected to, as she sees it, the absence of truth, a criticism Woolf makes in both "The New Biography" (1927) and "The Art of Biography" (1939). Yet, at the same time, she acknowledges the problem of this pursuit. Any attempt for biography to be truthful of the subject but also to capture the personality of that subject were a combination of "something of granite-like solidity" and "something of rainbow-like intangibility" (Woolf, 1927, p. 95). In this uneasy combination, biographers, as she views them, must tread the line between the verifiable facts of the subject's life and elements that are closer to fiction due to careful selection. Woolf argues that "...in order that the light of personality may shine through, facts must be manipulated; some must be brightened; others shaded; yet, in the process, they must never lose their integrity" (Woolf, 1927, p. 95). She moves on to argue that the biographer is bound by facts, from which the selection is made, but all the necessary facts should be made available; in contrast to the biographical effigies of the generation before. Woolf is, however, quick to clarify that the facts she describes are not the facts of science ("always the same"), but subject to changes in opinion (although she is not specific about whose opinion) (Woolf, 1939, p. 121).

Contemporary sociologist Mary Evans (1999) also suggests that auto/biography is based upon fictions, referring to both nineteenth and the twentieth-century biographies: fictions not only about the subject of the biography, as Woolf too suggested, but also concerning what it

is possible to know about any particular individual.² This is part of her wider argument about whether auto/biography ever allows its readers to know the subject. She describes how the construction of the self can distort accounts of the subject and how such constructions are based on a general assumption that “we are an integrated individual self, with a coherent persona,” and the social expectation that we are a “knowable person... with a coherent emotional curriculum vitae” (Evans, 1999, p. 23). The fictional aspect of the biography for her is the assumption that human lives are coherent, made of organised experiences and “lived according to a narrative model” (Evans, 1999, p. 24).

Twentieth-century biographies, like those Woolf describes, sought to unearth the truth and the personality of their subjects; to hang “looking glasses at odd corners” in order to discover failures as well as successes (Woolf, 1939, p. 121). They looked to deconstruct the myth-making which had been woven around the biographical subjects (either by previous biographers or in their autobiographies), to root out the omissions and reanimate the effigy (Evans, 1999, p. 20). More than that, they began to describe the whole life of the subject rather than just the public or social identity that the preceding generation sought to portray. This meant that not only was the private/domestic life beginning to be acceptable material but also that the life being described was given greater context (Lee, 2009, p. 75). Much like the contextualisation of specimens in the early twentieth century described in Chapter One, biography sought to put the “fish [back] in the stream” (Woolf, 1939b, no page).³ The great writer or scientist did not dwell in absolute isolation and the daily life, domestic occurrences and trivial little problems provide the “stream” in which the writer works. This necessarily meant the kind of intrusion the generation before abhorred, and a move further into the personal life of the subject, something that has escalated into the twenty-first century. Mary Evans views this as having escalated since the 1960s: “...auto/biography is now allowed (indeed expected) to reveal everything that can be found about an individual” (Evans, 1999, p. 4).

The pursuit of the subject’s personal life, with its emphasis on many aspects of life rather than just great deeds, gave a sense of a more knowable subject. Several writers describe the influence of psychoanalysis on this inclusion of the personal in life writing (Evans, 1999, p. 18; Lee, 2009, p. 84). Psychoanalysis encouraged the sense that one might discover the truth of the subject if one looked for the hidden aspects of a life. By examining and carefully interpreting the trivial and everyday clues, one might allow the subject to become knowable. This diagnostic approach, where marginal details can offer insight into personality/character of the subject, has been examined by Carlo Ginzburg, who argues for what he called a new

² Evans makes little differentiation between autobiography and biography in her particular argument (Evans, 1999).

³ Woolf used the analogy in describing the difficulty she had with her own memoirs – “...we know very little of the subject of the memoir; and again how futile life writing becomes. I see myself as a fish in the stream; deflected; held in place; but I cannot describe the stream.” (Woolf, 1939b, no page)

“evidential paradigm” influenced by “medical semiotics”, where diagnosis was made from apparently superficial symptoms that may appear irrelevant (Ginzburg, 1979, p. 280). He did this by comparing the analysis of Sigmund Freud, the detection of clues by Sherlock Holmes and the system of attributing paintings by examining overlooked details developed by art critic Giovanni Morelli (1816-91); inspired by the medical training of their creators. Edgar Wind describes the clues that Morelli used as “...our inadvertent little expressions reveal our character far more than any formal expression that we may carefully prepare...” (Wind, 1960, p. 5). Freud compares Morelli’s technique to psychoanalysis, which also looks for the concealed things in the previously unnoticed details, providing material to interpret the subject’s inner life (Freud, 1955, p. 222). Influenced by this way of diagnosing an individual life, the biographer also uses the trivial everyday incidents of their subject’s life to interpret their inner life for the reader. The everyday life becomes material to interpret with incidental moments becoming just as telling as the public deeds.

For example, in the kitchen directly below Virginia Woolf’s bathroom, the cook could hear her talking to herself as she took her bath each morning. She was saying “sentences out loud that she had written during the night. She needed to know if they sounded right and the bath was a good resonant place for trying them out” (National Trust, 1998, p. 5). This routine domestic episode would not have found a place in the Victorian biography, being too personal and everyday. In the later approach to biography, it provides domestic details to be interpreted. It gives insights into the creative process but, in doing so, tells us about daily routine and the more intimate, eavesdropped moments, contextualising the work in the life that created it. It becomes a telling anecdote.

The etymology of anecdote is from the Greek, *anekdota*, or ‘things unpublished’. The overlooked or the seemingly everyday are tied up in the anecdote, like those inadvertent gestures that assisted both Freud and Morelli. The anecdote provides a biographical fragment that could be interpreted as a clue to the whole subject. Catherine Gallagher and Stephen Greenblatt examine the anecdote as part of their position statement on New Historicism. Originating in literary theory, New Historicism aims to both understand literature through its cultural context and understand history through literature. They argue that “[the anecdote] offered access to the everyday, the place where things are actually done...” (Gallagher and Greenblatt, 2000, p. 48). These anecdotes also have the effect of making the subject more real (knowable) to their reader, bringing them imaginable closer to us. In its everyday-ness, they argue, the anecdote brings a “touch of the real” to a history (Gallagher and Greenblatt, 2000, p. 49).⁴ The biography that describes the facts of a life and mostly refers to the subject’s great works keeps the ‘revered’ subject at a distance from the reader,

⁴ This is something which “mainstream historians” may regard only as “rhetorical embellishments” (Gallagher and Greenblatt, 2000, p. 49).

as if a statue on a plinth. Whereas the biography made up of telling anecdotes, carefully interpreted and narrated, brings the subject closer because, in the negligible details and the flash of the everyday, they can be taken down from that plinth and made mortal.

The next part of this section moves to consider how the home might describe its inhabitant and, inadvertently, create a form of material autobiography; something that might later provide the house museum with its material biography. The home and the dweller's life were intimately tied to such an extent that the one could be read in the other, encouraged by another of the century's new disciplines: "... the science of sociology described the arrangements of individual rooms on the theory that room mirrored the life of its occupant" (Perrot, 1990, p. 342). The home gives the individual a personal and private space in which to feel at ease but it also allows that individual to be read in its arrangement.

It is telling that in the five-volume wide-ranging examination of the *History of the Private Life* (1990), Michelle Perrot's volume on the nineteenth-century has a large section on the home. Although the adage of the Englishman's home being his castle was already in common usage by 1700, it could be said to have gained true currency in the nineteenth century (Marcus, 1999, p. 3; Vickery, 2008). The home was not merely a roof over one's head: it was a space that could be quite one's own, if only through the way one filled it; a space that was secure and protective; a place to put down roots, in an increasingly rootless society. In the nineteenth century, more people were able to afford their own spaces and quantities of personal possessions.

As an alternative to public life, the home became tied to developing ideas about, and desire for, a private life. The idea of a private life was the creation of the early modern period and it has been claimed that England was the birthplace of privacy (Aries, 1989, p. 5). The notion of privacy was entrenched by the late eighteenth century, reaching its zenith in the Victorian period (Vickery, 2009, p. 26). It was the golden age of private life and the "quintessence of privacy" was the home (Perrot, 1990, p. 342). Benjamin argued this separation of public and private life, interior and exterior, was a defining feature of the nineteenth century (Benjamin, 2002a, p. 19). He adds to these the distinction between work and home, the idea being that, unlike previous centuries where many had worked from their dwellings, in the nineteenth century the home was increasingly separated from the world of work. However, this distinction has been questioned in recent decades as it does not take account of women's experience or that of the servants (Davidoff, 1979, p. 64; Fuchs, 2005, p. 110). Nonetheless, nineteenth-century dwellers could compartmentalise the world, their life, into more manageable (more specialist) areas. The notion of privacy appears essentially protective, as the biography had been.

The nineteenth century was a period of profound change, which saw rationalisation, secularisation and industrialisation in society: “The private residence serves as imaginary bulwark against ontological anxiety, fear of dispersion, and dread of un-centeredness, which to a large extent define the bourgeois psyche....” (Maleuvre, 1999, p. 121). The domestic interior, especially that of the middle classes (the subjects of both Maleuvre and Benjamin’s examinations), becomes a response to the exterior world. This results in an influx of things into the domestic space to make it comfortable and personal. Benjamin describes the bourgeois room of the 1880’s where the owner has marked out their presence with “ornaments on the mantelpiece, the antimacassars on the armchairs, the transparencies on the windows, the screen in front of the fire” (Benjamin, 1999a, p. 734). Homeowners brought the outside world inside through collections of naturalia, for example, glass cases containing fern collections (Barber, 1980). The home becomes identified as being a retreat that both filters and protects the inhabitant, providing comfort from that increasingly bewildering exterior world: “Home sweet home was designed to assuage these fears...inside meant family and security, outside meant strangers and danger” (Perrot, 1990, p. 369). The nineteenth-century interior held a mirror up to the exterior world in its décor and, in sampling the outside world they brought it under domestic control, making it safe and manageable (Olalquiaga, 1999, p. 284). Home becomes particular to the inhabitant through the objects that fill it which in turn comforts the inhabitant with familiarity and the inhabitant can control, be selective about, what shares their personal space.

The nineteenth-century home was divided between those rooms for receiving visitors and those for the household only. The presence of these semi-public rooms within the domestic retreat was tolerable because the inhabitant could control who could access the home; “The assignment of rooms for various uses ...were governed by strategies of encounter and avoidance shaped in part by desire and concern for the self” (Perrot, 1990, p. 346). In such a space, the inhabitant could shape their experience of society and influence the opinion of those who enter their world, allowing some intrusion whilst some personal space remained sacrosanct.

Reception rooms, with their function as both intensely personal spaces as well as locations for receiving visitors, provide particular insight into their inhabitants. In these rooms, one starts to see the impulse to represent self through décor, contributing to the possibility of the material autobiography. The reception rooms, like the drawing-room, were a material means of conveying to guests those aspects of the host’s life that the host wished to convey or, rather, a representation of how he wished himself to be seen. This was all intimately tied up with the social ritual of visiting. A culture of formal visiting had become common during the eighteenth century (Vickery, 2009, p. 14). By the nineteenth century, this practice was firmly established. It was a social ritual with “...the regularly scheduled reception, the ‘day’ on which the lady of the house was ‘at home’ to visitors” (Perrot, 1990, p. 368). To accept visitors

to one's drawing room exposed the host to scrutiny. Their reception rooms, therefore, had to stand up to such scrutiny: "The display of self and surroundings was the alpha and omega of visiting." (Vickery, 2009, p. 295). A tastefully appointed home was a sign of respectability and gentility (Flanders, 2003, p. xxxiv). The home, mediated by these visited spaces, was bound up with the inhabitant's social identity.

In her examination of the modern interior, design historian Penny Sparke says of the nineteenth-century home, that it reinforced these social identities (Sparke, 2008, p. 25). The state of the home, and therefore of the inhabitant, was morally oriented and closely linked to the respectability. The domestic space became a material representation of character and the domestic self, considered by some the truer self (Flanders, 2003, p. xxiv). Therefore, the respectably furnished drawing room was a material manifestation of social respectability and social acceptance.

This perception was encouraged by the century's literature. During the nineteenth century, literature had begun to describe homes and domestic interiors in minute detail (Perrot, 1990, p. 356). In some instances, the house or the objects seem almost to be characters in the story or, at the least, to reflect their dweller which encouraged this notion of the home mirroring the dweller. For example, in the novel *Wuthering Heights* (1847), the descriptions of the characters of Edgar Linton and Heathcliff are comparable to the descriptions of their homes; Edgar is blond and fair skinned and his home is light and well appointed; Heathcliff is dark with deep-set eyes and his home is dark with deep-set windows.⁵ However, this takes its most obvious form in the works of Dickens. He is especially noted as a chronicler of domestic life (Flanders, 2003, p. xxiii) and, more than that, of domestic interiors in novels like *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841), *Dombey and Son* (1848), and *Bleak House* (1853). Through his writing, Dickens described a multitude of domestic interiors which he intricately linked to the lives of his characters; the fate of a character was so frequently bound up or reflected in some aspect of their homes. This is examined closely in David Ellison's essay "Mobile Homes, Fallen Furniture, and the Dickens Cure" (Ellison, 2009) where he examines the accumulation and importance of objects to the Dickens characters and then the ways that the disintegration of the characters' fortunes was echoed in the disintegration or loss of their home. The archetypal Victorian drawing room, of heavy patterning and upholstery and every available surface covered with objects, may still have reflected its inhabitant, but not well (Olalquiaga, 1999; Sandberg, 2003). Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the cluttered interiors, of the sort that Dickens was writing about, were being heavily criticised for their "excessive materialism and lack of aesthetic control" (Sparke, 2008, p. 22).

⁵ *Wuthering Heights* uses mirroring of places and people repeatedly and this might be described as 'pathetic fallacy'. A term coined by John Ruskin, for the attribution of human emotion and conduct to all aspects within nature. (Ruskin, 1856)

Good taste became a marker of social respectability. However, at the turn of the century, the tasteful interior was an indicator of more than good character. Penny Sparke argues that,

By the turn of the century the parlour had been replaced by the living room, the latter seen as a much more informal space in which the notion of 'personality' rather than of 'character', could be expressed. The former was linked to morality and to a world which recognized fixed principles of conduct while the latter 'connoted magnetic attraction, fascination, aura and charm.' (Sparke, 2008, p. 35)

The interior of the home, then, could be a sign of personality. Personality implies individuality as opposed to conventional good character. This combination of personality and taste in the domestic interior enables the inhabitant to stamp themselves onto the interiors through the choices they make in their décor. The inhabitant is using objects to tell their visitors something of themselves: the home represents their notion of themselves.

Yet, there is also an aspect of the home's interiors that provides a less conscious form of self-representation. The creation of these interiors, which both provide comfort from the exterior world and reveal both character and personality, also carry signs of their inhabitant through the marks upon those objects caused by the act of dwelling. The bourgeois interior of the mid- to-late nineteenth century was a recurrent theme in Benjamin's writing. He viewed the bourgeois interior as being full of traces and the connection between the interior and the trace in the nineteenth century as being concerned with a desire to preserve the evidence of the inhabitant's presence (Benjamin, 1999a, p. 734).

The interior is not just the universe of the private individual; it is also his *étui*...the bourgeois has shown a tendency to compensate for the absence of any trace of private life in the big city... It is as if he had made it a point of honour not to allow the traces of his everyday objects and accessories to get lost. Indefatigably, he takes the impression of a host of objects; for his slippers and his watches, his blankets and his umbrellas, he devises coverlets and cases. He has a marked preference for velour and plush, which preserve the imprint of all contact...The traces of the inhabitant are moulded into the interior. (Benjamin, 2002a, p. 20)

The traces left on plush or velour were created by the daily life of the inhabitant. This trace might reassure the inhabitant but it also behaves as a witness to their domestic life. Objects upon which someone has imprinted their lives are indiscreet. These interiors are "the origin of the detective story, which inquires into these traces" (Benjamin, 2002a, p. 20). The trace is capable of enabling someone external to the home to read the domestic life. In this way, these traces of daily life provide the signs that might be read; and if the interior mirrors the dweller, then these traces are signs of the dwellers life which, rather than being the conscious representations of self, bring the reader closer to the private self.

Even the choices made to make the interior more comfortable can be interpreted for aspects of the inhabitant's life, which they may never have expected. In *Sense of an Interior*, Diana Fuss examines the homes of four writers in order to try to "open a window onto both the author and the text" (Fuss, 2004, p. 2). In doing so she focuses less upon the genius at work and more upon the daily life of her subjects. These are short biographies informed by

choices made in her subject's homes: a means of understanding them better and gaining insight into their lives. By examining the architecture of the spaces in which they lived, she shows the adaptations that were made to compensate for the writers' various vulnerabilities. For example, Freud was a little deaf and so his Vienna office located in such a way that it was insulated from street noise (Fuss, 2004, p. 77). From this, she divines aspects of their characters/personalities. The home's interior becomes the material that informs a biography.

Both the biography and the home represent their subject's public and private faces, or rather the public and the more personal sides of their subjects. In both, too, the subject uses strategies of disclosure and avoidance to control how they are represented. This is shaped by a concern to protect the self. The drawing room was analogous to a stage set upon which the inhabitant could perform their social identity, showing their good character and great taste. It is a presentation of the way the inhabitant wished to be seen with no revelations to undermine that good impression. In this, it was perhaps analogous to the Victorian biography, or to the autobiography of a subject careful to control their own legacy. It is from this nineteenth-century legacy that the biographical museum emerges and the next section will examine how these museums use this to create their material biographies.

Material Biography: How Everyday Life is Impressed on the Home, and the Insights its Reconstruction offers the Modern Visitor.

This section is concerned with how the biographical museum is influenced by, and uses, aspects of the biography and the nineteenth-century interior described above. It investigates how material biography in the museum uses material forms of anecdote and everyday life to narrate their subject's life. It will examine how these techniques, which in the reconstructed study reiterate the image of the genius at work in the reconstructed living space, humanise them. However, this section will also start to question whether, in the process, the museum merely reasserts the mythmaking that can surround the subject rather than necessarily communicating the real life. Initially, it is necessary to consider the notion of the period room a little further. The display technique, described as the period room, has appeared in both the preceding chapters: the first as a means of contextualising the object and, in the second, as a means of conveying the contiguity point of objects, the traces of creativity.

Period rooms are reconstructed historical interiors that are particularly indicative of a person, age or region. They have been a key curatorial technique for the display of objects associated with the arts (architectural, fine or decorative) or social history (Keeble, 2006, p. 1; Bryant, 2009, p. 80). The art-historical period room is predominantly used to show best examples of its type of object. The social-historical period room showing examples that best

represent the period being shown with emphasis on the everyday lives of various social groups. These rooms could have been transposed from their original sites into a museum or shown in either historically similar or directly associated sites (Aynsley, 2006, p. 9).

However, as a term, the period room does not satisfactorily describe the reconstructed dwelling curated in museums of this research. Mark Sandberg uses the term “missing person or living picture display” in his examination of Scandinavian Folk Museums (Sandberg, 2003). The folk museums he discusses can be described as social-historical period rooms, but he pushes the period room medium further than the contextualisation and desire for authenticity otherwise written about in the limited selection of texts on the period room (Aynsley, 2006; Bryant, 2009; Keeble, 2006; Pilgrim, 1978). ‘Living picture’ displays encourage the viewer to imagine that like the original collector, they had just stumbled upon the original scene. They enable the sense that the objects were back in use, enabling the viewer to “forget the role of the curator’s hand in the display and to imagine instead the depicted or implied hand of the display to be the original ... hand (Sandberg, 2003, p. 195). Sandberg argues that these displays use the rhetoric of home, cohabitation; facilitating the impression of being at home with the former resident when these *in-situ* displays were entered and, therefore, of a potential for their imminent return. What follows will show the way the rhetoric of home is employed in the museums of this study in combination with the life writing and the material autobiography of the interior, described in section one.

Many biographical museums have at least some of their rooms reconstructed into ‘living pictures’ of their former celebrated inhabitant. The study, as discussed in Chapter Two, is the most frequently reconstructed but increasingly other living spaces are being reconstructed. This is happening as further homes are established as museums and as older museums are refurbished. The ‘living pictures’ can now include bedrooms, kitchens, dressing rooms and servant quarters of the celebrated which give a broader picture of family life not just the subject’s life. The bedrooms of Beatrix Potter, Charles Dickens and Benjamin Disraeli are open for the viewing; the drawing rooms of Dickens, Darwin and William Morris can be visited without a calling card; and the kitchens of Potter, Morris and Dickens can be inspected. In the Dickens Museum, the refurbishment changed the museum from one drawing room reconstruction to almost a whole house reconstruction, including the kitchens with carelessly left open drawers. This will be examined in the final section.

Here, I wish to focus on Down House and its 1990s refurbishment under English Heritage; the authors of the useful principle with which the chapter began. Down House has the advantage, in signification terms, of having a forty-year association with its celebrated owner. However, up until the refurbishment, the only space curated as if in use was the study which

has been curated in this way since 1929 when, with the help of Darwin's son, the house was first opened to the public. The current curator stated that,

During the 1990s project that English Heritage carried out ... the ground floor rooms were reconstructed as they appeared during the 1860s during Darwin's lifetime. This was to provide a more fitting interior for the house and to support the display of the Study, so that visitors felt as though they were stepping into someone's home rather than a museum.

There was an opportunity to reconstruct the family rooms that the Darwin's had lived in for so many years and therefore to display objects in an original house setting rather than in museum style displays. To achieve historical accuracy in reconstructing the rooms we used a series of photographs taken of the interiors by Leonard Darwin during the 1860s-1880s, which really helped to recreate the interiors. (Kemkaran-Smith, 2013)

The result is that the modern visitor can walk through Darwin's drawing room, dining room, hall and billiard room as well as entering his study. The curators stopped at these ground floor rooms and did not progress to the remaining house, unlike the Dickens Museum. One cannot view Darwin's kitchen or his bedroom (until 2016), as these are the café and part of exhibition space respectively. When questioned about the first floor, the more personal spaces of the house, the curator said that,

The first floor of Down House is used as a museum space where the story of Charles Darwin's life before Down House is explored by displaying objects associated with the voyage of HMS Beagle and his scientific work. We have no plans to reconstruct the bedrooms as the inventories of these are not overly helpful and we feel there is more to offer visitors by having a thorough discussion of Darwin's life and work instead. (Kemkaran-Smith, 2013)⁶

Although the most private of the Darwin family's rooms remain unavailable to the modern visitor, the house and the rooms that have been reconstructed are displayed to express their inhabitant in ways that not only use the rhetoric of home and the interior but also can be viewed as biography, seeking to reveal the life. This museum enhances the reading of its reconstructed rooms with audio-visual guides and a guidebook to draw the visitor's attention to specific features of the curation; in 2009, it also had an interactive tour of the ground floor of the house. The latter two forms of museum exposition are examined in more depth below.

If the act of dwelling is an important means of signification in biographical museums, then what does this reconstructed interior communicate of its former inhabitant through the rhetoric of home? Down House's reception rooms (semi-public spaces) were the most controllable for the Darwin family in terms of visitors and subject to those strategies of disclosure and avoidance.⁷ The drawing room of Down House is displayed as it would have been, in the later part of Darwin's life in the home. As in many other displayed houses in the

⁶ However, in June 2016, English Heritage opened Darwin's bedroom to the public. It is a recreation without original objects, where visitors are encouraged to dress up and use objects (McKie, 2016). This change happened right at the end of my research, images can be found at <https://www.facebook.com/homeofdarwin/posts/1241437879230138>.

⁷ Analogous to the strategies of concealment and revelation used by the owners of cabinets of curiosities described in Chapter One.

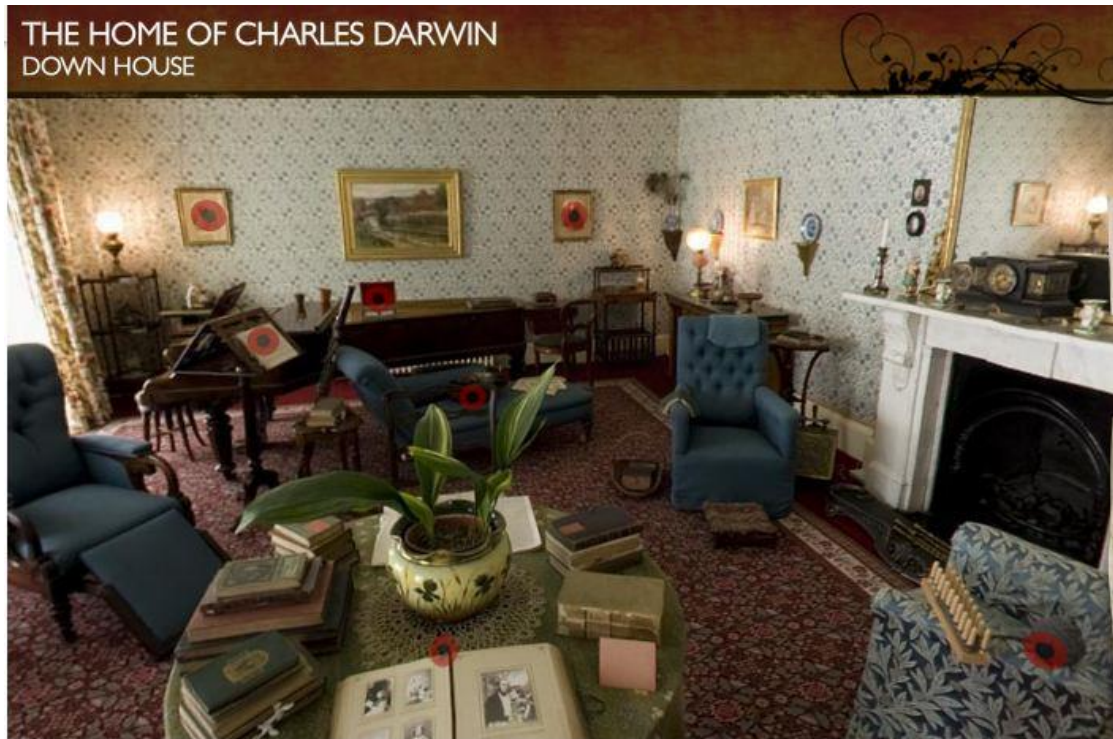


Figure 1 - Screenshot of the Drawing room from the 2009 English Heritage interactive site – www.english-heritage.org.uk/Darwin2009 - reproduced by permission of Historic England.

United Kingdom, there is a portion of the room roped off for visitors with the remaining room being a “living picture”. Figure 1 is a screenshot taken from the English Heritage interactive site (the red circles are hotspots that took the user to information pages about specific objects). These screenshots are of interest for the way that they draw the viewer to specific objects and the interpretation material that accompanies them. Similar techniques are used in both the guidebook and the audio-visual guide to highlight objects as illustrations of particular aspects of the subject’s life.

There are two distinct ways in which we can view this drawing room as an expression of self and therefore as a material biography: through the idea of a social self and the domestic self. As discussed earlier, social identity was tied up with the home with the ritual of being at home for visitors opening up the domestic world for the outside world, however carefully selected those visitors would have been. Whereas the domestic identity could be described as the more ‘natural’, less fashioned by social expectations. In reconstructing the drawing room, the curators present the former inhabitant as they would have been presented to their contemporary visitors. Judgments of taste and character could be made and interpreted as signs of the family’s status in society. If the reconstruction is faithful to the Darwin family home, then the curators are reiterating the family’s assumptions about themselves.

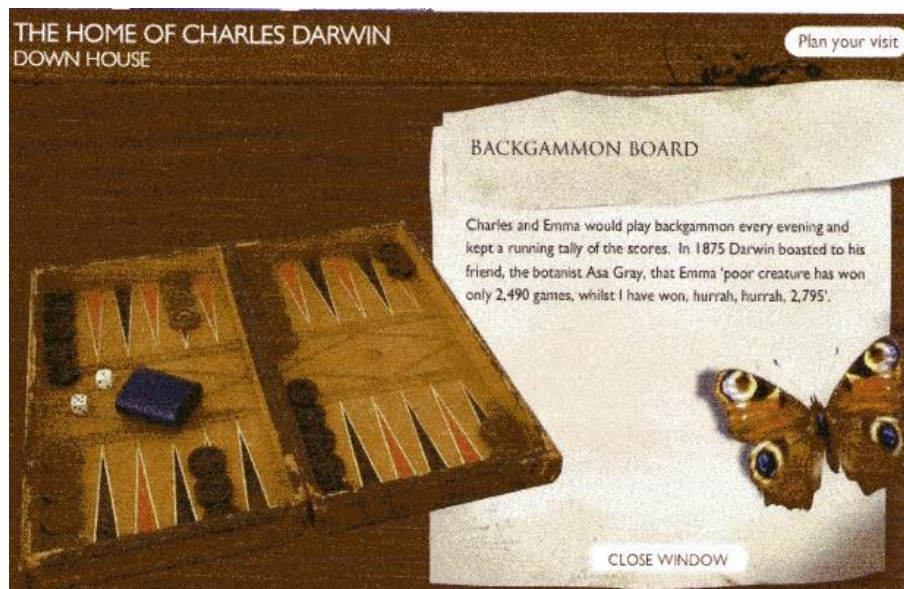


Figure 2 - Screenshot of Hotspot from the 2009 English Heritage interactive site – www.english-heritage.org.uk/Darwin2009 - reproduced by permission of Historic England.

What of the criteria written into the English Heritage's principles: insight into personality, aspects of character, as an extension of what is known about the subject? This comes from the use of the rhetoric of home. Small curatorial touches provide the inadvertent gestures of daily life and routine: the backgammon board for example (Figure 2). This is left, laid on a side table of the drawing room, open with its counters and dice placed as though half way through a game. These are objects highlighted in the museums interpretation media. The visitor is told how Charles and Emma 'duelled over their daily game..., keeping tally throughout their lifetime' (Reeve, 2009). Such an incidental daily domestic occurrence is essentially irrelevant to the scientist's life history but is the kind of incidental anecdote that provides insight into not only his family time but also his apparent competitiveness. Likewise, the visitor's attention is drawn to the chaise beside Emma's piano on which Charles would lie to listen to his wife play. The other hotspots draw one to other domestic anecdotes: the Darwin family are represented as a quintessential Victorian family pursuing appropriate activities. The domestic anecdotes continue throughout the ground floor displays. The inner hall is highlighted in interpretation media for particular associations with the Darwin children. The slide Charles had made for his children to slide down the stairs, which was apparently also used by Emma and the governess (Figure 3). Even the cupboard under the stairs is highlighted and reconstructed with appropriate objects, including manuscript pages upon the back of which his children drew pictures.

In biography, the life behind the public face only became acceptable as part of life writing during the early twentieth century. The domestic anecdotes above offer insight into the man behind the 'genius' at work, or public face. Although these anecdotes are clearly based upon



Figure 3 - Stair Slide. screenshot from <http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/home-of-charles-darwin-down-house/history/collection> - reproduced by permission of Historic England.

biographical information researched by the curators and existing biographies, because they are presented to us as anecdotes, we might have the feeling that we have stumbled upon the real man behind the works. This provides the modern visitor with a sense of knowing the subject, bringing them closer to us in some way.

Despite these humanising anecdotes, do we glean any more from these reception rooms than the Darwins' visitors? Although these anecdotes do take us beyond the basic facts of the Darwins' life and extend our knowledge beyond the genius at work, they are only an impression of intimacy. Like the formal visitor of 1870s or 1880s, we are invited into the home and presented with a period appropriate image, which adheres to Victorian senses of propriety. The curators are presenting an image of the ideal family man that reiterates biographical sources. However, in doing so, they are providing the visitor with an insight which the subject would not find too revelatory. In other biographical museums, curators are able to push this object/anecdote technique beyond the reception rooms of their reconstructed homes. Where bedrooms and kitchens are reconstructed, the visitor is provided with the impression of intruding on the private life. In all but perhaps a few examples, this impression is a carefully cultivated mirage, discussed in section three of this chapter.



Figure 4 - Screenshot of the study from the 2009 English Heritage interactive site – www.english-heritage.org.uk/Darwin2009 - reproduced by permission of Historic England.

Chapter Two examined how the studies of figures like Darwin were fetishized by ideas of the genius at their labours, resulting in the study being the most ubiquitous of modern recreated home spaces. However, they can also be viewed as spaces that were amongst their subject's most private rooms: spaces that welcomed few visitors and were therefore less concerned with the portrayal of the social subject. The personal library (or study) was "the ideal place for retreat" and a place for keeping "one's own self" (Chartier, 1989, pp. 134-138). It was a space of everyday use where the inhabitant would not be preoccupied with possible intrusions from visitors and therefore did not need to pay attention to how the space might be interpreted by those outside the family. Although irrevocably connected to creative labours, they can also be viewed as spaces intimately connected with the lives of their users and with uses that could be unrelated to their working life. One can read the great writer, scientist or composer in such spaces but one can equally read personal narratives into such rooms, something that I will argue biographical displays choose to do. This is especially true of Darwin's study and, in what follows, it will become clear that the display of Darwin's study in his former home is just as concerned with daily life as it is with the genius at his labours. The reconstructed Down House study, through its curation and the anecdotes English Heritage chooses to illustrate, allows the visitor 'insight' into domestic Darwin, creature-of-habit Darwin, and the physically vulnerable unguarded Darwin. In doing so, the auratic genius at work is humanized and the signification of his forty-year residence is asserted.



Figure 5 - Screenshot of Hotspot picture of Darwin's stool – <http://english-heritage.org.uk/Darwin2009> - reproduced by permission of Historic England.

The 2009 interactive site's hot-spots draw the visitor's attention to a wheeled stool and to a walking stick leaning against a straight-backed chair (Figure 4). In the study these are tools of the genius' labours, however the associated anecdotes are domestic. We are told that the Darwin children were regularly allowed into the study and it sometimes doubled as a sickroom (Reeve, 2009). As Darwin's possessions, the stick and stool (Figure 5) had a life beyond occasional furniture and walking prosthetic; as toys with which the children would punt themselves around the room (English Heritage, 2009; Keynes, 2009, p. 87). These were domestic moments which are essentially irrelevant to the communication of the biography of a Victorian scientist but, by communicating these domestic anecdotes, the curators are temporarily dispelling the aura of the genius; and allowing us to glimpse (or gain insight into) the family man. The visitor is further allowed to get to know the person whose house they are visiting.

However, what this study most shows is the way that this kind of 'living picture' curation materially expresses its subject's life. By reconstructing rooms in the home like this, the museum shows its visitors a uniquely Darwinian space that has been built up over decades of dwelling and use. In addition, they draw the visitor's attention to specific areas of the rooms that communicate the particularities. For example, the way in which he arranged his furniture for "practicality and convenience" (Reeve, 2009, p. 10). The "convenience" of the arrangement had been honed until it precisely fitted his requirements, the compact arrangement of the alcove pigeonholes mirroring cramped working conditions aboard the *Beagle* (Reeve, 2009, p. 10). In such rooms, the objects take on the form imposed by the

subject through long use and routines. The longer the use, the greater the build-up of useful things within easy reach and useful adaptations that fit their user. Moreover, these quantities of things with which the subjects surrounded themselves develop into an outline around the subject's activities: by extension, these objects create the outline of Darwin. Through these adaptations and accumulations of objects, one begins to gain insight into Darwin's daily life.

Habit shapes both objects and people and, in this way, the space is changed to fit its inhabitants. More than that, the objects are affected by those habits. Darwin's chair (Figure 10 in Chapter Two) was specially adapted for him with the wheels enabling him to wheel across from table to window: anything out of reach could be reached without getting up. The wooden strut across its front was added to make it more comfortable. This chair was physically shaped to mould to Darwin. The seat cushion still looks plump, although wrinkled, and the front has two visible parallel indentations, the negative impression of the sitter's thighs. The indents on Darwin's chair can be read as connected to his work but perhaps say more about the amount of time he spent in that chair, the routine of his domestic life. This form of trace of activity also builds up with years of activity. Living in the home has physical effects upon the home and objects, and those traces of activity, the material marginalia of Chapter Two in the home, are parts of the subject's material biography, made up of material anecdotes.

Benjamin describes the home as like a case in which one places an object: a box containing an indent which precisely fits the object or a velvet coverlet made to cover a specific object. A mould is created by the imprint of everyday routines and the objects with which the subjects surround themselves and this precisely fits the dweller, further personalising it.

The nineteenth century...conceived of the residence as a receptacle for the person, and it encased him with all his appurtenances so deeply in the dwelling's interior that one might be reminded of the inside of a compass case, where the instrument with all its accessories lies embedded in deep, usually violet folds of velvet (Benjamin, 2002a, p. 220).

In the domestic interior, the trace of the inhabitant's everyday activity both shapes the space and forms an impression of that inhabitant. This is a mould of the subject, like that compass case, but can also be a form of material comfort blanket. In the same piece of writing, he then goes on to shift analogies again: "The original form of all dwelling is existence not in the house but in the shell. The shell bears the impression of its occupant...the dwelling becomes a shell" (Benjamin, 2002a, p. 220). Dwelling is a means of "...fashioning a shell for ourselves" (Benjamin, 2002a, p. 221). The shell is protective and shaped by the life of its inhabitant.

Whilst Benjamin is writing very specifically about the bourgeois interiors of the later nineteenth century, there are similar processes at work in the homes of the subjects of biographical museums. The suitability of the dweller to their home was described by Virginia Woolf, thirty years before Benjamin: "The life, by Mrs Gaskell, gives you the impression that

Haworth and the Brontës are somehow inextricably mixed. Haworth expresses the Brontës; the Brontës express Haworth; they fit like a snail to its shell” (Woolf, 1904).⁸ Although she says this in relation to a biographical text, her use of the shell as an analogy to describe how a person becomes inextricably biographically associated with their home is apposite to, and a founding principle of, the biographical house museum. Even once the dweller has gone the shell remains a mould of its former resident, or that is what we require from such homes. Likewise, the traces of daily life in the interior are another means of viewing the homes of figures such as Darwin. More so than the self-conscious interiors of the drawing room that offered insight only into a host.

The shell as an analogy for Darwin’s home, something that the curation encourages in its reconstruction, is bolstered by the adaptations that he made to the house itself. He began to make the house his own very early in his ownership. He had the lane in front of the house lowered and diverted to prevent the “intolerable” gaze of passers-by (Reeve, 2009, p. 34). He also made significant changes to the house adding four different extensions over the years (to the rear and to both sides of the original square Georgian building) (Reeve, 2009). The effect of these extensions, confirmed if one looks at the diagrams presented in the English Heritage guidebook (Figure 6), was to centralise the study at the centre of the house. The extensions are built up around his study, making it not only central but protected on three sides. The study becomes like the indentation in the compass case of his home. It is not precisely a compass case in the ways that Benjamin describes. However, the ways in which

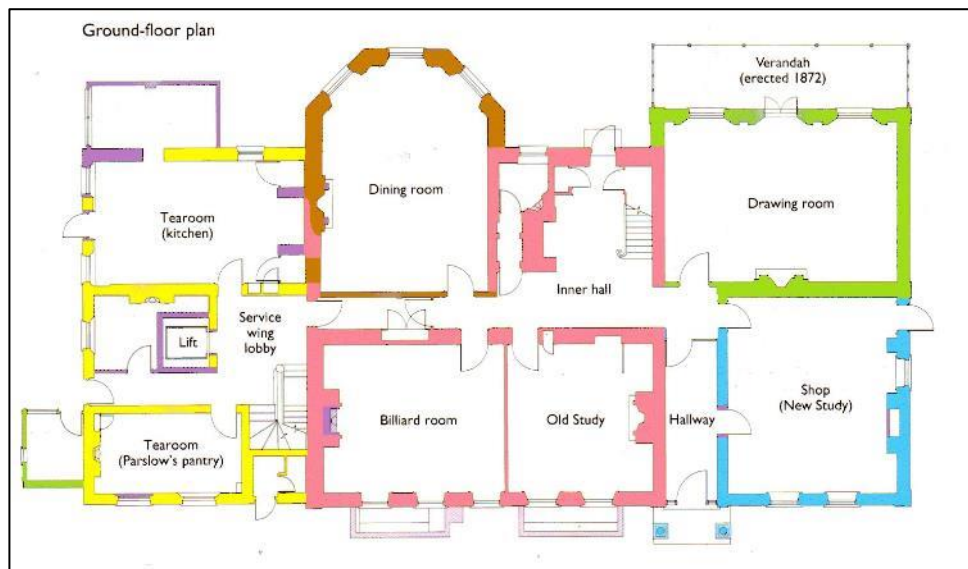


Figure 6 - Plan of the ground floor of Down House, from English Heritage guidebook - reproduced by permission of Historic England.

The pink section being the oldest part of the house, followed by the brown, the yellow, the green and the blue (Reeve, 2009).

⁸ It is interesting to note that Woolf begins her article about Haworth with a paragraph which implies that she sees no benefit in being in the spaces once occupied by ‘great men’, unless it adds something to the understanding of the works.

Darwin adapted his study and, in fact, his home, and subsequently filled it, did create a Darwin-shaped mould. The adaptations and alterations made to the house and gardens, and carefully reconstructed or preserved by English Heritage, give the impression that the Darwin family pulling up of the drawbridge. Down House is portrayed as a place in which Darwin needed to control his environment. For example, a feature, now absent from the building but featured in an older Down House guidebook, was “a small mirror [fixed] to the outside of the building between the two [study] windows so that if he looked up he could see any visitors approaching before they reached the front door” (Morris, et al., 2000, p. 6). This was a sign of a man who did not wish to be disturbed or interrupted.

Dwelling in the Darwin home is represented as an act of sequestration, a withdrawal from the heterogeneous world into one that is highly homogeneous and predictable. In this representation, the curators present their visitors with another highly personal but frequently reiterated element of Darwin’s daily life: his frailty and concerns over the reception of his ideas. Most of the Darwin biographies, and the English Heritage guide, discuss Darwin’s frail state of health. He suffered regular bouts of debilitating illnesses, which necessitated a regimented lifestyle, resulting in social isolation. However, this isolation became self-perpetuating; leaving Down House, especially without Emma, brought on his symptoms. Fear of his symptoms stopped his sociability. Although the illnesses were very real and debilitating, it has been said that his ailments were psychological (Bowlby, 1990, p. 457; Dillon, 2010). His illness and retreat from society could have been prompted by fear of how society would react to the ideas he was wrestling with or by the act of wrestling with those same ideas (Desmond and Moore, 2009; Dillon, 2010).

These illnesses are on public show in the reconstructed study through the exposure of a formerly private corner of the room. In the far corner of the darkened study is a partition protruding from the wall, sheltering the alcove to the left of the fireplace, covered in wallpaper so that it blends into the rest of the room (in the background of Figure 4). On the floor, behind the partition, there is a shallow white tin bath visible. This partitioned corner of the study was his own “makeshift privy” (Reeve, 2009) where he dealt with his ailments. It was a partially hidden place now exposed to public gaze. It exposes his frailties to anyone who enters the study.

In this exposure, the curators are representing this Darwinian trope of the frequently ill recluse which also appears in many modern biographies (Desmond and Moore, 2009; Dillon, 2010; Jones, 2009; Keynes, 2009; Stott, 2003) They give the impression that this was a man who had retreated to Down House. His home became the shell around him, protecting him from the wider society that might threaten him; or rather the threat that might come from negative responses to his work. Although an extreme example of the domestic interior as a

space for retreat from the world, it shows the way the home as haven and comfort blanket can be created and become highly personalised⁹ and subsequently reconstructed.

What is interesting about this reiteration of the trope of ill health and reclusiveness is that, rather than being a representation of the Darwinian private life that offers us insight, it is in fact, a reiteration of a piece of Darwin's social identity: his reclusive persona and need for privacy. In the pursuit of the psychological truth of the man, the biographies and the material biography are revealing aspects of the man behind the works but are actually perpetuating a Darwinian myth. Janet Browne has argued that in fact Darwin's reputation for reclusiveness could have been a conscious self-fashioning, although she is at pains to state that he did not manipulate his image in the way others of his time did (Browne, 2003). She argues that privacy was central to Darwin's sense of self but that his persona drew upon a tension between public and private (Browne, 2003, p. 175). On the occasions he accepted visitors, other than close friends or family, he did so in a carefully controlled way, accepting them into the drawing room and making sure he would not be asked spontaneous questions (Browne, 2003, p. 179). In essence, his reclusiveness encouraged the celebrity mystique that grew up around him at the time. She goes on to question whether his deliberately detached stance may have contributed to the development of the Victorian scientific persona.

The impress built up over years of habitation have signified houses like Down with their former inhabitants. This is what curators use to create a material biography of that inhabitant, through the reconstruction of home and object associated anecdotes. These are made up of the many selves the subject adopts in their daily life, whether social, domestic or personal. This enables the possibility for insight into the subject's personality, the person behind the writer, scientist, or composer. In houses like Down House, the creation of the material biography is almost ready-made in the associated objects and rooms which have such long-standing association with their inhabitant.

⁹ In a further example, George Bernard Shaw required such a retreat which is evident not only in his home Shaw's Corner, but in the way he divided himself; he thought of himself as GBS in public and Bernard Shaw in private. Even his home's name, corner, implies that sense of retreat. When he moved there it was called New Rectory, but the villagers started calling it Shaw's Corner. He moved there to hide away from people, he even called his revolving hut in the garden in which he worked, his 'retreat' (National Trust, 2008).

How to Create a Biographical House Museum: The Formation and Means of Assuring Biographical Museum Significance

The intimate association between the inhabitant and their home underpins the signification of the reconstructed house, something that curators use to communicate their subject's life. However, there are a number of biographical museums that do not have the long build-up of personal associations with their subject and yet are transformed into biographical museums. These can either be houses that were briefly dwelt in by the subject or, in some cases, houses in the general area of the former home. The birthplace house museum can also be included in this list as frequently having little-lived association with their subject. This section will consider those museums that do not have long habitation as their means of signification and the compensatory practices they employ to overcome this: beginning with sites with a short duration of dwelling, through the Dickens museum in London; and moving onto the birthplace museum, through the Elgar Birthplace Museum.

The Dickens Museum in Doughty Street in London was established in 1923 and was one of four Dickens Museums (only three of which are open today). The house is the only surviving Dickens home (Charles Dickens Museum, 2012) and was his first family home. It is the house which, according to the guidebook, was the site where he wrote three novels, and by the time he moved, to accommodate his expanding family, he had gone from being relatively unknown to being famous (Charles Dickens Museum, 2012, p. 3). Much of the furniture now displayed in the museum has come from his final home Gads Hill (now a school). The Doughty Street house was only his home from 1837 until 1839. Such a short time frame results in a smaller degree of signification than other biographical museums such as Down House.

Before the 2012 refurbishment, the museum only reconstructed the first-floor drawing room as it might have been in Dickens' time in the house. The remaining rooms were predominantly filled with cabinets of Dickens' objects from throughout his life and objects connected to his novels. In the same year as the Dickens bicentenary (2012), the museum was refurbished and now curates its rooms to resemble Dickens' home whilst he lived there. This includes those rooms that would have been used to welcome visitors: the dining room, the morning room and the drawing room. As well as those which would have been accessed only by the family and servants: the bedrooms, Dickens' study and the basement kitchens. In some of the rooms, the change is dramatic (see Figures 7-8). The curator's reconstruction includes specific touches to encourage the experience of being in a home, despite the occasional glass-cabinet.



Figure 7 - The Dining Room in the Dickens Museum - in 2008 and 2014. Photograph: Caroline Morris





Figure 8 - A bedroom in the Dickens Museum - in 2008 and 2014. Photograph: Caroline Morris



The drawing room is the largest room in the house and, with the exception of a single glass cabinet, is essentially displayed as a habitable room. The room is decorated in a Regency style and the patterns of the wallpaper and carpet appear in several portraits of the writer (Charles Dickens Museum, 2012, p. 27). The Drawing room was where Dickens received visitors, but also a space in which he could mould how his visitors saw him and display his social position; something that was particularly important in Doughty Street, as this was the home he made for his family at the beginning of his career (something the museum makes a virtue of in its guidebook).¹⁰ In reconstructing these rooms, the modern museum is attempting to reconstruct Dickens' social identity. The anecdotes in the museum's interpretation material (guidebook, interactive screen and labelling) inform the visitor of Dickens' use of the objects and rooms during social, semi-public occasions. For example, the way the drawing room was used for impromptu readings of his works (Charles Dickens Museum, 2012, p. 27). He was a character who was skilled in the art of playing his audience, choreographing his celebrity. His drawing room was an arena from which he could manage his domestic identity to a visiting society. The Dickens presented is Dickens the host and, in part, Dickens as the author/performer. However, the blurring of author's life and works is still apparent. Dickens presented the dwellings of his protagonists as being a reflection of their character or, at the least, their potential fate. In some way, he created the impulse to read his own objects.

From this, one might wonder whether this museum needs to compensate for the lack of association between the subject and the home. The "living picture" technique creates a house that encourages the visitor to feel at home in the space. This sense of home is so established in the modern mind that one can temporarily forget that the original association was so short. Little curatorial touches like a dress laid out ready for the room's dweller or a kitchen drawer left carelessly open, despite being more like a stage set, give the impression of the objects back in use, the "implied hand" of the subject (Sandberg, 2003, p. 195). The rhetoric of home is a compensatory practice used in combination with the use of some original objects. The museum interpretation material reiterates the homeliness of the display, welcoming the visitor into the "London Home of Charles Dickens". On their website, they advertise private viewings that would enable the visitor to have "...the magical experience of walking through the house which feels as though Dickens has just stepped out the door" (Charles Dickens Museum, 2016).

However, the curators choose to interrupt the sense of being at home with the inhabitant with an occasional glass cabinet. The Dickens drawing room has no ropes to prevent the visitors making themselves at home. However, as one enters the room, scanning the neatly

¹⁰ Dickens was acutely aware of social position thanks to the situation in which his father had repeatedly put the young Dickens and family, resulting on one occasion in being put in the workhouse (Charles Dickens Museum, 2012).

appointed Regency room, one's eye finally alights upon a vast glass box containing his customised performance lectern. The sense of dwelling is interrupted by the glass museum furniture but also by an object that never had a place in the drawing room. Each of the private rooms also has at least one interruption. For example, the evocatively placed nightdress on Mary Hogarth's bed is offset by a mannequin dressed in a lilac dress and a glass box containing an open book is incongruously placed on a side table. Through these interruptions to the recreation of the subject's former dwelling, these museums reveal a discomfort in recreating dwelling without making its artifice clear, by showing their museum-ness. This leaves the potential for even the most beautifully recreated private space to become as public a stage set as their drawing room might have been.

The birthplace museum, based upon sites where the celebrated subjects were born frequently does not have a strong association to signify it, sometimes lacking the signification of creative, illustrative or dwelling sites. These Nicola Watson calls "cradles of genius" (formative environments), as opposed to the "workshops of genius" (Watson, 2006, p. 57). Birthplace house museums frequently only have the fact of someone's birth to create any sense of association to their subject. As Sophie Forgan says, "...birthplace museums often lack original artefacts, as most of the interesting things in the person's life happened elsewhere" (Forgan, 2012, p. 256). Of course, there are a few birthplaces where the subject also lived and worked throughout their life, such as Woolsthorpe, the biographical museum of Isaac Newton, but there seems to be a larger proportion where the only association the site has is the 'accident of birth'.

Whereas long habitation, in addition to creative and illustrative sites, has a clear influence on the subject's productive life, the birthplace does not. The connection to the subject seems slight at best and unless there are a great number of objects to bolster the signification of the site, it may all seem a little arbitrary. It may be, for this reason, that a form of biographical museum hierarchy has been implied by some museums and writers, including Forgan. For example, on the website for Shandy Hall, the house museum dedicated to Lawrence Sterne, the curator Patrick Wildgust introduces the museum in a three-minute video: there is a portion which seems to imply that his museum has greater significance than that of a birthplace museum.

...the fact that it was the place where Lawrence Sterne wrote ...Tristram Shandy... rather than he was born ... gives it a particular significance. This is the place where the work was created so therefore perhaps it's got a different feel to it than it would have if it was *just* an accident of birth or death. (Wildgust, 2010)

On the one hand, it must be remembered that this is a promotional video to encourage visitors to his house museum but, on the other, his words do imply that the accident of birth is not enough to create a memorial. The impression given is that the places where subjects

lived and worked (during their adult lives) are far more significant. They have a quality that is superior to the birthplace. Efforts to recreate the houses as they would have been at the time of the subject's birth might be of historical interest, but without either the work or the life being thoroughly embedded in the fabric of the house, these efforts seem entirely artificial.

As the Dickens example shows, efforts can be made to compensate for brief association using the rhetoric of home alongside an emphasis on certain connections with specific works or life events. However, the specific compensatory efforts made by the Elgar Birthplace Museum, by both its subject and later custodians, are very specific to Elgar and his birthplace museum but will prove to be indicative of the way less associated sites can construct their associative narrative. It will also show how biographical strategies of legacy control are also present in the museum.

Although Elgar was born in the Broadheath house, he only lived there for two years. All the creative work of the composer occurred elsewhere, rather than in this house, although he wrote many of them in Worcestershire. The family had moved there in 1856, Elgar was born in 1857, and they moved back to Worcester in 1859 (Neill, 2006, p. 6). The family did not live in the house again, although the Elgar children were sent to the house for a holiday in the summer of 1867. It was during this holiday, when he was ten years old, that it is believed that Elgar wrote the "Tune from Broadheath" (Moore, 2004; Neill, 2006, p. 10). This was a tune which Elgar biographer Jerrold Northrop Moore claims emerges a number of times in his later works. The only other connection Elgar had with the house came later in his life. He made repeated visits to the Broadheath house and on some occasions took



Figure 9 - Elgar Birthplace - The Birth-room. Photograph: Caroline Morris

friends. He would be driven out to the house and, according to the then tenant, ask to see the 'birth room' (Figure 9). He took his wife to see the house early in their marriage. He also took his friend Herbert Howells on a visit, probably in 1932, and he recounts that Elgar spent a quarter of an hour on his own upstairs in the birth room and then showed Howells the room. He also recounts how, as they were leaving, Elgar said; "I don't expect much from the nation, but if ever they think it worthwhile, I wish they would buy this little cottage. It's the only wish I've got, about the nation and me" (Neill, 2006, p. xii).

After his death in 1934, his daughter Carice and the 'corporation of Worcester' bought the Broadheath house, they then formed the Elgar Birthplace Trust. They appealed for funds through the *Daily Telegraph* in 1935. It appealed to "the vast army of Elgar's admirers who wish to honour the memory of a man who, like Purcell, made English music respected and admired throughout the civilised world" (Neill, 2006, p. 14). All of this was to help towards making the cottage at Broadheath "so dear to lovers of music as the national monuments of Stratford, Chalfont and Grasmere are to lovers of poetry" (Neill, 2006, p. 15). Carice Elgar curated much of the initial display. This included a partial reconstruction of his study and desk in one of the downstairs rooms. She remained heavily involved in the Birthplace Trust for the remainder of her life and was able to keep tight control on her father's legacy.

The Elgar Birthplace Museum, then, does not have those elements which create the signification of the biographical museum; lacking long habitation, acts of creation or presence in the work (illustration). Any notion of dwelling is absent because he spent so little time living in the house. The little time he did spend in the house was when he was two years old, besides a brief holiday. No work was carried out in the house and, strictly speaking, it does not appear in any of the work in the same way as it might in a novel, poem or painting. If these elements are so integral to the signification of biographical museums, how can their absence in this case be compensated for? Certain of his and his follower's behaviours provide compensations for these omissions of long habitation, creation and illustration.

Creation and illustration, as a means of signification, are conjured up through the anecdote of the "Tune from Broadheath" and, or rather, what has been made of this episode. The importance of this short tune relies upon the date of its composition being 1867. This date is based upon a scrapbook dated 1901, created by Elgar, in which he had annotated the short manuscript as 1867. The fact that the first reference to the tune was when Elgar was well into his fifties has led some writers and biographers to question the emphasis upon this tune's importance (Harper-Scott, 2009; Riley, 2009, p. 12). However, the connection stands and provides a direct connection between the house and his compositions. Through this association, he and his biographers create the necessary connection to creative production and the location being illustrated in the work. Elgar further embeds his creative output to the landscape around Broadheath in something he said as he lay dying. He

apparently whistled the theme from the Cello concerto and said, “if ever you’re walking on the Malvern Hills and hear that, don’t be frightened...it’s only me” (Moore, 2004, p. 202).

This connection to Broadheath, at least through its tune, was a means of building up the significance of his childhood. This has the effect of attaching significance to the birthplace through the music. It is an example of how Elgar’s own nostalgia for his childhood transforms the house into something more than it is. Several biographers have stated that he idealised his childhood and was totally immersed in his own nostalgia (Moore, 2004; Neill, 2006, p. 11).¹¹ “It was the past when he thought he had been happy, the present when he so seldom was – until it became the past and turned to gold” (Neill, 2006, p. 11). The birthplace then becomes not so much a site for the memorial of a composer, but a vessel for his longing for an idyllic childhood which (if the musicologists/biographers are to be believed) is something that permeates his music.

How can the lack of dwelling be compensated for? The modern museum does not try to recreate the house as it had been in his time there as that would exclude a large proportion of his life.¹² It also does not try to translate the rooms from his last home into this small space. When the birthplace was founded, Carice Elgar was responsible for the curation of the



Figure 10 - Elgar Birthplace - The Hobbies Room. Photograph: Caroline Morris

¹¹ Matthew Riley’s whole book is based upon Elgar’s nostalgia (Riley, 2009)

¹² That is however, precisely what the Holst Museum in Cheltenham does. It also has a limited association with its subject, but chooses to recreate a couple of rooms as they would have been if Holst had continued to live in the house.

materials. When it came to the study, she arranged the objects in the attempt to “capture the atmosphere of her father’s study and fill it with objects which he would have used daily throughout his composing life” (Elgar Foundation, 2006). To this day, this remains the only room that comes close to a recreated living space and very close to Carice’s original arrangement. The remaining rooms are cabinet filled, however, concessions to homeliness come in the patterned curtains, pot plants and fireplaces in most rooms (Figures 10). Even the types of cabinets in the house are very furniture-like, unlike the visitor centre, which opts for the more modern museum display. This house cannot hope to recreate dwelling in the way that long associated sites such as Down House or Beatrix Potter’s Hilltop might but it uses home like touches to attempt some kind of house museum atmosphere.

A less material means of partially compensating for the lack of dwelling in the birthplace comes from Elgar’s pilgrimages back to his brief childhood home which go some way to compensate for the lack of adult dwelling. For the biographers, these visits are a sign of his longing for childhood but, considered in the light of the later museum, these visits become a means of establishing a life-long association with the house. They provide anecdotes of his trips and witnesses of his association. He was creating associative narratives between himself and the house which could later be used to justify a memorial. Elgar’s actions at Broadheath are a sort of ‘heavy hint’ for his close friends who would care for his legacy. By taking his friends to the Broadheath cottage, he was building his own legend. Elgar was weaving his own biography into the bricks of the cottage to enable it to be the perfect memorial to assure his legacy: creating the justification for the museum and in that location. His actions give the appearance that he was creating his own museum. Indeed, the ways in which Elgar built his own memorial, makes one wonder how aware he was of the biographical museum phenomenon as a means of confirming one’s status in posterity. Whilst in Bonn in 1892, he had visited Beethoven’s Haus (established in 1889) and one could speculate that this may have contributed to his apparent wish for a memorial and to the elements necessary for such a memorial (Lihoreau and Henley, 2007, p. 61).

The Elgar Trust itself also plays this justification game. In its request for subscriptions for the creation of a museum, the Trust was also myth-building. The comparisons made to Purcell, who was at that time considered the last great English composer, establish Elgar as a great composer. Then the references to “Stratford, Chalfont and Grasmere” (Neill, 2006, p. 14) were attempts to place him into the canon of great Englishmen alongside Shakespeare, Milton and Wordsworth. The Birthplace is a worthy memorial for a man who is worth a memorial, and the precedents for such memorial are cited. Elgar should join Purcell in the pantheon of great English composers; and Shakespeare, Milton and Wordsworth in the nation’s memory through the medium of biographical house museums. Accordingly, although the Elgar Birthplace Museum has such a brief association with the composer, through his

actions and prompts to his friends and family, he created the site as appropriate for his memorial.

The idea that he was manipulating his own memory and legacy reflects his character. This is apparent in objects in the museum and in biographies where one gets the impression that, for example, he resented the necessity of being a violin teacher. Elgar was preoccupied with his status, even concerning his marriage. Alice was the daughter of a respected army colonel whilst Elgar was a piano tuner's son, an itinerant musician and a Roman Catholic (Lihoreau and Henley, 2007). Her family disapproved and the way in which Alice pushed Elgar to be more successful was probably an attempt to regain her position in society. As he was trying to become a recognised composer, or achieve relative success, he had to continue teaching. This impression is endorsed by something that lies next to the violin in the cabinet. It is a piece of paper covered in figures. The label reads:

Elgar often made reference to the fact that he was virtually self-taught. When he eventually became Master of the King's Musick in 1924, he listed his educational expenses, "...in full, for general and musical education," a total of £56.10 shillings. (Museum label)

The desire to make such a document reveals a man trying to prove a point. A man who for years felt himself an outsider, the son of a shopkeeper who was not part of the music establishment, but would later come to represent it. He felt separated from society by his Catholic faith in a country and musical community dominated by Anglicanism and by his social position. It was these insecurities that led to his preoccupation with his own social position and legacy. The house would be a fitting memorial, a sign of posthumous respectability, and a means of controlling his legacy after he had gone. Biographer and documentary maker John Bridcut reiterates this view of Elgar as highly concerned with the image society had of him, saying that he was one of the wildest image consultants of the last century and that he enjoyed bamboozling posterity (*Elgar: Man Behind the Mask*, 2010). More than that, he was seeking to manipulate posterity and weave his own myths about his life through the materials he left behind and the museum he made it clear he deserved.

This example shows how the less associated sites can build their associative narrative. However, he was not the only figure mentioned in this text that was involved in similar projects of legacy control and memorial construction. For example, Sir Walter Scott who built and lived in his own memorial, giving guided tours in his own lifetime and therefore constructing it as a literary shrine ready for posterity. Dickens too was a flagrant self-mythologizer and provided his memorial makers with imagery, narratives and locations to represent him (Malcolmson, 2012). George Bernard Shaw was 'publicity seeking' and 'self-promoting' and he approached the National Trust about Shaw's Corner: "Has such a trifle any use or interest for the National Trust?" (National Trust, 2008, p. 3 and 17). Beatrix Potter retained control of her legacy by bequeathing her home and land to the National Trust. She stipulated the rooms and furnishings "should be kept in their present condition" (National Trust, 2005, p. 19), and

left a detailed inventory of where each object should be placed. Potter was being her own curator and deciding precisely how she should be materially represented.

In each of these examples, the subject of the museum had posthumous control over their image. It would seem that they saw the value of the material display of their lives in their homes after death, just as they may have done in life when, in the cases of Dickens, Scott and Shaw, they presented their social identity materially through their reception rooms of the home. The biographical house museum uses dwelling, in addition to the former presence of creative acts, to create enough significance to be founded. In the absence of any of these, they can attempt to compensate by either creating (finding) narratives to associate their subject with the house in the way that Elgar did or by creating the atmosphere of home through the arrangement of objects as his daughter Carice tried to do. The relative success of these attempts relies upon the sensitivity of the visitor to either the subject or more generally the atmosphere of home.

The use of reconstructed dwelling is so embedded in modern visual representation of a life that it enables 221b Baker Street to play an even more daring game. It uses reconstructed dwelling techniques as a means to reconstruct a fictional life: habitation. The life of Holmes and Watson illustrated in the books is translated into a home; everyday material incidents from the books are shown as if they had happened in reality: illustration and creation. The traces of dwelling, which so evocatively reveal Darwin, are also present in the Baker Street home. Holmes' fictional life is presented as it might have been 'in life'. There is clear wear and tear on carpets and upholstery which could be read as signs of life. This reconstruction is made possible (and strangely plausible) by using the rhetoric of home and the compensatory creation of associative narratives. Although we walk onto a stage set when entering this home, the necessary tropes are there to secure us in our illusion that this is Holmes' home, at least partially.

The nineteenth-century figures, whose dwellings were recreated in the twentieth century, established a template which continues despite the non-nineteenth century origins of many more recent museum foundations. Biographical museums come from and exist in homes because they have become sites for self-expression and identity. The self that the subject creates in their home provides the museum with its material which, in turn, provides 'insight into their personality' and the possibility of finding 'aspects of their character...that extend' what we know about them (English Heritage, 2008, p. 29).

Rather than being solely based on the genius at work as described in Chapter Two, which views the subject in terms of what they are celebrated for, the reconstructed home also uses their personal lives, the everyday to interpret their subjects. The trivial, previously overlooked, anecdotes of the biography are illustrated in the reconstructions of the home. In doing so, such museums appear to be equally influenced by both nineteenth-century and twentieth-century ways of considering biography. This way of representing their subjects is aided by the way they use the rhetoric of home.

During the nineteenth century, the interior of the home increasingly became a space that was highly specific to its inhabitant, both personal and personalised. It was a place in which the inhabitant's sense of self could be expressed through the interiors they created: curating their objects and, in doing so, expressing their character, respectability, personality and tastes. These public rooms of the home offered their visitors an idea of their hosts as they wished to be viewed. In other rooms where daily life is lived less self-consciously, the inhabitant is expressed through the adaptations made to spaces and traces of living. These are the signs of dwelling or inadvertently curated spaces. The objects reflect the self because they have everyday life physically inscribed into them and they are arranged in order to enfold or encase, their owner. They provide material comfort and the type of and degree of this comfort also provides insight into the dweller. The shell or compass case was created as a form of comfort for the dweller. It comforts the dweller by being familiar because the dweller is surrounded by themselves; through the ways in which the interior, as a shell, outlined the inhabitant and the examples of self-expression present in the home. The interior of the home can, therefore, become a representation of the inhabitant.

The former home has become such a fundamental part of the formation of biographical museums alongside the association with the subject's creative product that absence of such means of signification needs to be compensated for. The inscription of the home has to be created through narratives of association which recreate those means of signification in the biographical museum. It needs to provide the sense of the home expressing the inhabitant because only then can the modern visitor be given the stimuli to enable them to gain an insight into the subject behind closed doors. The home continues to give the visitor the impression that they are seeing something more than a biography or the work can give them. However, the access that the visitor gets to the subject's private life is illusory but not out of keeping with the construction of the home, as seen in the drawing room.

Biographical museums are in essence controllers (maintainers) of legacy. In using senses of the subject at home, very often through forms of reconstruction of home, they might be accused of creating a selection of stage sets. However, the notion of the home as a stage set for the expression of a particular idea of self has the ring of familiarity to it. There is no contrivance unless it is comparable to the contrivance of the drawing room. The self-fashioning of the host through their well-appointed drawing room becomes the museums

fashioning of their museum subject through carefully reconstructed homes. However, this fashioning is doing no more than what Virginia Woolf suggested of biography, that "... in order that the light of personality may shine through, facts must be manipulated; some must be brightened; others shaded..." (Woolf, 1927, p. 95). In the end, the carefully reconstructed life, even in those homes deeply embedded with the lives of their inhabitants, resembles so many drawing rooms: being built on similar kinds of artifices to the drawing room. Further, the material control of legacy by figures like Elgar and Potter are equivalent to self-expression as representative of social identity or the carefully "brightened" or "shaded" facts of the biography. This is how they would wish to be remembered. The visitor may be left with only the possibility of a glimpse of, or connection to, the subject's true self but perhaps the impression of insight and a kind of intimate knowledge.

Chapter Four

Channelling the Subject in Biographical Museums: Object and Museum as 'Medium' for Speaking with the Dead

In previous chapters, I examined the way that traces of the subject are shown through their objects in biographical museums: to reiterate the notion of the labours of the genius through material marginalia and/or the ordinariness of their daily lives through material anecdotes. The former maintains the genius at an auratic distance; the latter gives the appearance of bringing the subject closer to us by humanizing them. Biographical museums seek to communicate a sense, or impression, of the subject's former presence. Chapter Four considers these gaps between the subject and the modern viewer, the ways in which the museum appears to bridge them and the potential for a sense of connection to the subject through their objects that this could allow. It examines the ways in which the displayed object, as a medium, can be a means of restoring the subject's absent presence, and how that might allow the visitor to go beyond association with the subject's traces. It will examine the ways in which objects and their display may provide a connection between the subject and the modern visitor

Traces, or inadvertent material gestures, that make recreated homes and workplaces evocative, are created by close association with the subject's daily life. Frequently these are the only material remnants of the absent subject available in the museum, which means that the visitor is always at least one remove from the subject of their interest. Any contact that we, the modern visitor, can have with the subject is through their remaining traces. Ben Highmore says of history writing that, "there is no direct contact with the past, of course, only commerce with its traces" (Highmore, 2006, p. 23). This can also be applied to material history (and therefore material biography). Highmore goes further saying that

Historians desire the dead...Desire, though, faces an epistemological limit: what there is of the past (its documents) exists for the historian only in the present. Speaking to the dead gets replaced with speaking for the dead – a heady mixture of necrophilia and ventriloquism. (Highmore, 2006, p. 24)

The draw of the past, which he describes, is similar to the draw that leads to the creation of biographical museums. One could say that the curators of these museums are doing the job of speaking for the dead. However, the use of original associated objects (evocative traces), combined with narrative exposition from the museum (reconstructed dwelling) and visitor imagination, may enable the impression of speaking with the dead through their

objects: something that could resemble ventriloquism, but which I describe as museum psychometry. By psychometry, I refer to the late nineteenth-century Spiritualist practice of obtaining information about an object's history, or about people or events with which it has been associated, purely by touching it or through close proximity to it.¹ In the biographical museum, we are communicating through objects whether speaking with the dead subject or speaking for them.

The object can be considered as a medium, through which to connect to another, at a distance. In the early nineteenth century, a connection between the living and the dead through objects was apparent in the material culture of mourning practices, something examined by Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey in their book *Death, Memory and Material Culture*. They consider the ability of objects to connect the living to the dead and to enable the material presence of the physically absent loved one. The notion of a medium through which to contact an absent other is evident in later nineteenth-century developments, both in the sense of a spirit medium contacting the dead, and the technological communication medium allowing connections across distances. The biographical museum shares its nineteenth-century origins with these other practices: all of which enable forms of contact with individuals across spatial and temporal distance.

The first electric telegraph was transmitted during 1831, the year the *Beagle* set sail and two years before Walter Scott's house Abbotsford opened to the public. When Darwin was in the Galapagos in 1835, Morse code was invented for use over the telegraph.² In early 1839, Darwin got married, at which time the newly invented medium of photography was being presented to Académie des Sciences.³ The first Spiritualists, table-rappers, appeared during 1852, five years after Shakespeare's birthplace was opened. The telephone was invented in 1876, two years after Darwin's near séance experience.⁴ The electric phonograph, or wax cylinder recording/playing, was invented in 1877, the year of Elgar's birth, with gramophone recording following ten years later. Elgar was the first composer to use recording to disseminate his music. Radio signals were successfully sent and received during 1902, the year Rudyard Kipling's short story "Wireless"⁵ was published and mass broadcasting in 1919, the year Elgar's cello concerto was premiered. The beginning of an escalation in biographical museum foundations came during the 1880-1890's, when psychic mediums were beginning to manifest the spirits they were

¹ Not to be confused with its more recent meaning - the science of measuring mental states and processes.

² <http://www.mediahistory.umn.edu/timeline/>

³ http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/hd/tlbt/hd_tlbt.htm - It should be noted that Fox Talbot and Daguerre invented photographic techniques separately but concurrently.

⁴ He was invited, but departed early from a séance. His brother and cousin reported back to him on the experience (Desmond and Moore, 2009).

⁵ A short story in which parallel story lines about misunderstood radio signals, and a man unconsciously writing poetry apparently mediumistically channelling John Keats: an example of analogies drawn between Spiritualist mediums and technological ones (Kipling, 1902).

channelling. There were peaks in museum foundations during the Twenties and Forties: both post-world war, these peaks also saw increases in interest in Spiritualism (Hazelgrove, 2000; Warner, 2006, p. 244). The 1990s and 2000s saw an increase in the foundations of biographical museums; there was also a parallel increase in television programs about psychics and supernatural activity (Warner, 2006). The medium was a means to allow contact with the absent other at a distance, just as the associative object could.

Through the curation of objects as living pictures (as discussed in Chapter Three) the biographical museum encourages a sense of their subject's presence and, in doing so, they enable a sense of haunting, encouraging a sense of *genius loci*. Can the display of contiguously associated objects within the reconstructed homes of the dead subject enable a form of vicarious contact with the subject? If reconstructed dwelling places give the impression of being at home with the subject of the museum, then could they in any way provide the sense of the absent host, and might this sense become a sense of haunting? The use of the word 'haunt' is applicable in two ways. Most dictionary entries refer not to ghostly manifestations, but to the habitual. These objects and homes are haunted by the habits of their former owners. In fact, the various literary guidebooks, which emerged during the nineteenth century, called themselves 'homes and haunts' (Howitt, 1847; Watson, 2006). In this sense then, these are haunted spaces, with the traces of dwelling being the signs of such haunting.

Whether they can ever be haunted in the other, more supernatural sense of unseen or immaterial visitants, may seem unlikely. However, if one takes into account some established analogies that have been drawn between nineteenth-century new media and Spiritualism, the possibility of haunting regains some credibility. Ghosts and haunting have been used as analogies in several academic fields in recent years, including literary theory and media studies. This is thanks to its use by Jacques Derrida in *Spectres of Marx* (1993), who coined the word hauntology, a portmanteau of haunting and ontology. Haunting became a "conceptual metaphor" through which to understand culture, describing the spaces between apparent opposites: "visibility and invisibility, life and death, materiality and immateriality" (Peeren and Pilar Blanco, 2013, pp. 1-2) The ghost haunts the gaps created by the distances between objects, or as cultural theorist, Mark Fisher puts it, "Hauntology itself can be thought of as fundamentally about forces which act at distance..." (Fisher, 2012, p. 20).

In media theory, the haunted spaces are created by communication over the distance. In *'Speaking into the Air'* (1999), media historian John Durham Peters seeks to plot a history of the idea of communication, including Spiritualism and the new media of the nineteenth and early twentieth century. These new technologies allowed communication across increasing distances, both spatial (in forms like telegraphy etc) and temporal (through recording media). In Peters' view, this causes a desire for a sense of direct contact

(reciprocity), in both communication media and Spiritualism, despite such distance. This leads to the creation of compensatory practices which simulate proximity: one of his examples is the radio phone-in. Reciprocity and non-reciprocity in communication are something that will be discussed in this chapter in relation to the biographical museum. Although he does not discuss objects in this context, I will argue that these different ideas of communication at a distance, simulated proximity, and reciprocity, can be applied to the biographical object and its display: something which enables the visitor to have a sense of contact with the biographical subject.

Although these accounts of Spiritualism and media do not generally include object display and museums, parallels have been drawn between media and museum display. Film theorist Mark Sandberg writes about museums as media in his 2003 book *Living Pictures Missing Persons* (Sandberg, 2003). He investigates Scandinavian folk and wax museums and highlights the parallel rise of these museums and other new media, such as film. He views them as having, amongst other things, similar use of spectacle, attention and new forms of perception. He writes about the rise of highly detailed curation of objects that are shown as if still in use (as described in Chapter Three) and the way that the absent subject of the display is manifested through curation: something he describes as a metaphor of resurrection (Sandberg, 2003, p. 179). I will examine how, when the “missing person” display is used, biographical display can enable a sense of haunting in the museum. By outlining the subject’s absence and freezing rooms at the moment of the subject’s departure, as discussed in previous chapters, the biographical museum becomes a medium through which the subject can be manifested.

The first section of this chapter will consider the object as a medium. During the nineteenth century, death became increasingly ritualised through objects and dress. Such objects can be described as material memories, because they provide a material prompt for memories of the absent person, and therefore offer a connection between the deceased and their living loved one. Many such objects find themselves in biographical museums today and other objects join them to memorialise the subject. However, can they still allow a sense of a connection with the deceased subject? The second section will examine the museum as a medium. It will consider the curation of the home as it would have been, not as a means of being at home with the subject, but as a possible means of resurrecting the subject for the visitor. It will question the ability of such spaces to allow a connection with the subject and to create a sense of haunted space. The final section will consider the visitor as a medium, through certain visitor behaviours and documented responses. It will question the ways in which the visitor might connect with the biographical subject and whether their behaviours enable a sense of haunted spaces.

The Potential for Contact with the Dead Through Objects, and How That Might be Translated into Biographical Object Practice.

How can objects allow the living person (and by extension society) a sense of having contact with the dead subject? In the thesis Introduction, I described relics and certain practices that developed around them, more specifically, the use of bodily relics as a means of contacting the dead saint to intercede on the behalf of the pilgrim. In this discussion of biographical objects and display, it is this part of the relic analogy that could prove the most problematic. The biographical museums that I have been discussing do not present hallowed fragments of their subject's bodies for the adoration of the visiting public in quite the same way as the relic churches did. There are no bones or phials of blood in elaborate reliquaries.

However, there is a variety of object that features in several of the museums of nineteenth century figures which can be and has been compared to bodily relics (Hallam and Hockey, 2001; Holm, 2004; Lutz, 2011).⁶ The house museums of Jane Austen, the Brontës, Charles Darwin, Charles Dickens, William Morris and Walter Scott all have this exhibit in common: a lock of hair. The Austen house has a locket containing a lock of faded

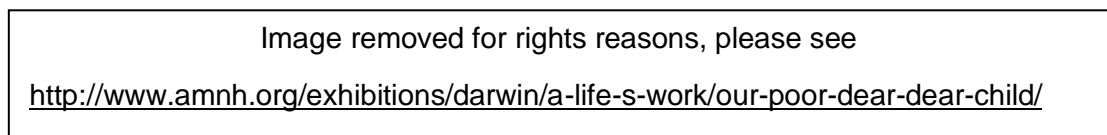


Figure 1 – Annie's Box - © Craig Chesek, AMNH

⁶ - although the analogy has not been examined beyond comparison

auburn hair that once belonged to the author; the Brontë Parsonage has a lock of Charlotte's hair in a black edged envelope; the Dickens Museum displays a locket containing a lock of Mary Hogarth's hair;⁷ there is a locket of William Morris' hair displayed in a cabinet at Kelmscott Manor; and the few strands of hair found in an envelope in Walter Scott's collector's cabinet belonged to Napoleon. The Darwin examples come in several forms: a hair work⁸ bracelet made with her own hair by Emma Darwin, a lock of Emma's hair belonging to Darwin and finally, a writing box (Figure 1) that amongst other things contained, "...a fold of paper with a thick lock of fine brown hair. On the paper is written 'April 23rd 1851'. And on a leaf torn from a pocketbook is a map of a churchyard: Annie Darwin's grave at Malvern" (Keynes, 2009, p. 1). Indeed, during 2009 a further example of hair was discovered in the Darwin family collection. Ety's box became national news during 2009,⁹ when Randall Keynes (a Darwin descendant and biographer) loaned it to the Natural History Museum for their *Big Idea* exhibition. Amongst the treasures found in it was a folded piece of paper with a message saying 'Found after his death in my father's papers' and contained hairs from her father's beard (Figure 2) (Natural History Museum, 2008). The family were unable to obtain locks of Darwin's hair before his burial but found stray hairs, which were carefully wrapped up.

Image removed for rights reasons, please see

<https://www.theguardian.com/science/gallery/2008/nov/14/charles-darwin-big-idea-exhibition>

Figure 2 - Darwin's Beard – Photograph: Ken Lennox

⁷ Dickens' sister-in-law who dies young and whom he held in deep affection.

⁸ Hair work was a popular craft from the seventeenth to the nineteenth century (Hallam and Hockey, 2001, p. 136)

⁹ <http://www.nhm.ac.uk/about-us/news/2008/november/darwin-exhibition-opens-with-hair-and-other-treasures.html>

<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/art/news/darwins-beard-on-show-for-first-time-1017271.html>

In each of these cases, the hair was removed from the body and preserved to fulfil somebody's memory needs relating either to love or mourning although, in both cases, the hair was to stand in for the absent other. The hair jewellery created by Emma Darwin or the lock of her hair kept by Darwin were kept, one imagines, as love tokens. The Napoleon hairs collected by Walter Scott probably had far more to do with Napoleon's notoriety and celebrity rather than any personal connection. However, those other wisps or locks of hair now in the collections of the Austen museum, the Brontë parsonage, the Dickens Museum, Kelmscott House and in the two children's boxes at Down House, performed a slightly different function.

On the face of it, the locket containing a lock of hair and the portable reliquary containing a fragment of a saint's hair resemble each other. They are also bound up with the expectation that the hair contained within, in some sense goes beyond being something merely cut from the now absent body, a physical remnant of the person. Once separated, the fragment begins to stand in for the absent person, and in that way enables a form of contact with them. The lock of Annie Darwin or Charlotte Brontë's hair provides something which the surviving family can keep hold of despite the subject's absence. The lock of hair in its container becomes both a means of holding onto something of the person and a conduit for contact with them. In the relic object, this is a contact with the divine, as the relic was both the object and that which it represented: the bone fragment standing for the whole saint. In the case of the locks of hair, now displayed in the biographical museums, the remnant provided contact through the memory of the surviving family. They could no longer have a direct contact with their loved ones but could have an indirect contact through a material intermediary. The retention of locks of hair after death, and subsequent placement in portable memorials (mourning jewellery), are part of what has been described as Victorian death culture: a preoccupation with the dead, mourning rituals, photography of deathbed scenes, need to capture last words and construction of memorials (Lutz, 2011).

Mourning jewellery had become popular in the eighteenth century, during the sentimental period (Holm, 2004, p. 139). Hallam and Hockey examine the phenomenon of hair jewellery as both forms of love token and mourning object. In both cases, despite some comparison references to relics, they view them as memory objects: "Hair was thus positioned as a visual medium infused with special powers of recall, holding in view both a part of deceased persons and references to further objects and spaces dedicated to memory" (Hallam and Hockey, 2001, p. 139). The locks of hair in their lockets (or envelopes) provide material sources for prompting recollections. The object enables a sense of connection with the deceased through memories, internal narratives of connection that can be endlessly replayed despite the subject's absence. Objects that have been so intimately associated with the dead individual, most evidently in the bodily fragment, enable a replay of the intimacy that was apparent in life. The object stand-in provided what Hallam

and Hockey describe as “a token of physical proximity with a loved one even after death.” (Hallam and Hockey, 2001, p. 165). The object provided a sense of contact with the absent person.

The physical remains of the dead can be regarded as the epitome of a memory ‘object’ as they stand, not only as a material reminder of the embodied, living person, but as a medium through which the dead might communicate directly with the living. (Hallam and Hockey, 2001, p. 134)

It is the living memory which enables the absent person’s presence. Whilst contact with the lock of hair would have provided Emma, for example, with a tangible piece of her absent daughter Annie, it was her recollections with which she was having contact. The memory and the imagination combine to re-manifest the absent other and from there enable a sense of contact despite distance.

Yet such experiences of the absent other through a lock of hair would seem to be specific to those that knew them. For those that come afterwards, especially those that lack any intimate relation to the subject, these locks of hair cannot enable the internal narratives that make the subject live again for those that survive them. As such, they would seem to be objects of personal memory and yet they appear in biographical museums and can still be powerfully evocative. What of such objects in the biographical museum? Can objects that are not bodily fragments provide similar senses of contact to their owner, especially where there is no personal intimate connection with the dead person? And could this explain the frisson that visitors can get from certain objects?

Whilst articles like locks of hair are intimate memorials prompting private memories of loved ones, in the biographical museum they are expected to be a public means of connecting with the celebrated dead. The recollections that are prompted by the objects cannot be personal, as they would have been to the subject’s relatives. The museum afterlife of such things relies upon their ability to allow not the replay of personal but collective memories. The property of memory is not integral to the object, and a response is not determined by the hair itself, but “by properties invested in it by social and religious patterns of belief” (Pointon, 1999, p. 43). However, in the display of these objects in the biographical museum, the internal replaying of such narratives is based upon differing degrees of knowledge of the subject, assisted either by museum interpretation material or by prior knowledge. These narratives can also be intimately bound to elements of the visitor’s own life, a sort of sympathetic identification (Agnew, 2007, p. 305). The visitor comes to the displayed object with memories, associations and ‘cultural histories’ of their own which affect their reading and experience in the museum (Garoian, 2001, p. 241). To these, in the biographical museum, one can add narratives based upon the visitor’s knowledge or experience of the subject’s work (examined further in Chapter Five).

Such bodily objects are evocative and intensely connected to the subject: they enable a sense of proximity through indexicality. An index, “can be described as a trace or imprint of its object...[it] implies a material connection between sign and object as well as an insistent temporality—the reproducibility of a past moment” (Doane, 2007, p. 136). Locks of hair were a means of trying to hold onto something of the person once they had gone. This is a similar impulse to that discussed in Chapter Two, the perception that the past is held in stasis for later access. This attempt at stasis through indexical objects can be connected with the death-oriented culture that comes to the fore in the nineteenth century. There is a sense that by removing a lock of hair or some item closely associated with the individual’s final moments, one would freeze that moment at that point and enable a form of enduring contact with the now absent person.

This distillation of the moment at which the person goes from present to absent in the bodily fragment is also apparent in other objects created at the point of death: the deathbed photograph and the death mask. Death masks were made of both the celebrated and the notorious and many of them still have places in modern museum collections, including those of Newton and Cromwell. These provided not only a sense of being in the presence of the subject, with their physiognomy, but also visual representations of the subject’s last moment.¹⁰ Such objects are created by the impulse to defend against the passage of time. An argument has been made that most visual arts are made for similar defence.¹¹ Andre Bazin draws an analogy between the visual arts and practices of embalming the dead, preserving the body’s appearance against the ‘flow of time’ (Bazin, 1960). He also compares photography to the moulding of death masks, and the relic, in the form of the Turin Shroud, this is based upon the “...transference of reality from the thing to its reproduction” (Bazin, 1960, pp. 7-8). The impulse to commemorate through indexical objects, created by direct contact with the body, is also apparent in another related Victorian ‘fad’: for the casting of the hands and feet of loved ones, especially children, (sometimes then carved in marble). These amputated effigies provide a (memory) connection to the absent other. Like those associated with a dead subject, they are an attempt to mitigate against the passage of time.

Indexical effigies of the absent subject provide a further example of the connections between the biographical museum and an older relic culture. For example, Sir Edward Elgar’s disembodied hand can be found lying on a rectangular black velvet cushion in a cabinet of the Elgar Birthplace (Figure 3). Ghostly white and cut off at just below the wrist, the hand looks fragile. The thumb and the little finger are tethered to the velvet. Like

¹⁰ Madame Tussaud began her career by taking of death masks, the techniques of which she went on to use in her waxwork displays, which regularly featured effigies of recently dead celebrities (Berridge, 2007)

¹¹ For example, by Hans Belting in his *Anthropology of Images* (2011)



Figure 3 - Cast of Elgar's Hand. Photograph: Caroline Morris

dissected veins, further wires protrude from the truncated right wrist. The label reads “Cast of Elgar’s hand taken in Rome 1907.” If one were able to turn the prostrate hand over and examine it in good light, the lines of the palm would be clear, as would the fingerprints and any calluses formed from writing and playing the violin. The cast taken of the hand has the immediacy of direct contact: the recesses and creases, all but imperceptible to the eye, are indelibly recreated by the casting medium. It does not have the connection with his death, but does carry memory and the evocativity of indexical contact; giving it something of the nature of relic-life objects.

Life/death casts of historic figures are displayed in many museums: one can view the hands of Chopin, Edward Burne-Jones, the Duke of Wellington and Lord Byron. Through their connection with the dead, these fragmentary effigies might allow a sense of contact, but the nineteenth-century relation to death is, in some ways, foreign to the modern viewer of such museum objects. The disembodied hand or death mask, once its direct origins are known, could seem disturbing. This response is contrary to that of the relic in its reliquary, whose direct bodily association with the dead would be revered and would reassure, authenticating its connection to the divine. In the case of an object like the hand, the effect it has on the modern visitor is prompted by its direct contact with the subject (revealing every crease and blemish), and its appearance of potential animation.

One way of describing the spectral frisson that one gets from a biographical object, such as Elgar's hand or a lock of Jane Austen's hair, is in terms of the uncanny. In his 1919 essay, Freud does refer to haunting (Freud, 1956, p. 371) and describes the uncanny as being related to an intellectual uncertainty created when inanimate objects appear animated (Freud, 1956, p. 385). The uncanny, or *unheimlich*, occurs when the familiar and known becomes somehow unfamiliar, unknown. Freud says that the uncanny is related to the "effacement of the distinction between imagination and reality," or when "symbol takes over the ... functions and significance of the thing it symbolizes" (Freud, 1956, p. 398). He suggests that the sensitivity of people to the uncanny varies.

Do the objects under discussion adhere to his description of the uncanny? They are boundary objects, between life and death, and between the real and the imaginary. This is because their materiality roots them in reality, whereas their meaning is rooted firmly in the imagination: whether in the memories of relatives or the collective memory the visitors have of the subject, or their work. They are present, but their meaning is contingent with the subject's absence, making that absent subject seem present. However, context is everything. The opposite of *unheimlich* is *heimlich*, which means familiar or belonging to the home (Freud, 1956, p. 371). Many biographical objects are familiar objects, but does their association with a particular person make them unfamiliar enough to make them uncanny? When displayed in the former home, probably not.

The uncanny does not fully describe the effect these objects can have and is contingent upon the context and the person being affected. In previous chapters, the biographical object has been described as auratic. Another aspect of Benjamin's description of aura could also describe responses to such objects; a different response that takes into account the object's familiarity (more *heimlich* than *unheimlich*). It is related to a sense of animation in the object and, therefore, to the possibility of reciprocity of gaze, briefly touched on in the introduction to this thesis.

Experience of the aura thus rests on the transposition of a response common in human relationship to the relationship between the inanimate or natural object and man. The person we look at, or who feels he is being looked at, looks at us in turn. To perceive the aura of an object we look at means to invest it with the ability to look at us in return. (Benjamin, 1999d, p. 184)

In the uncanny, the blurring of animate and the inanimate is unexpected, thrust upon the viewer; in the aura, this blurring is expected because the viewer invests the object with potential animation. In the notion of the reciprocal gaze, the biographical object returns to its possible relic origins. Relics are described by Patrick Geary as being in the category of objects that are both persons and things (Geary, 1988, p. 169), that is both animate and inanimate. To perceive aura, as Benjamin describes it here, is to view the biographical object as one might the relic.

Up to this point, the objects under discussion can be described as ‘bodily’ biographical objects rather than ‘contact’ biographical objects. However, death also makes non-bodily biographical objects evocative and auratic. Death, in particular, has provided source material for personal and public collections for centuries. Some are artefacts related to notorious deaths, for example, the bloodstained shirt that Charles I wore for his execution¹² or a fragment of rock from the place General Gordon was killed.¹³ Displays of death objects were immensely popular. Mark Sandberg cites a Swedish example where the effigy of a tragically killed aeronaut was displayed in the suit he had worn, alongside the parachute which he had lost before his fall.¹⁴ He describes this practice as “...irresistibly fetishistic, as if the return to (and energetic investment in) the last moment of presence before death could ward off the real absence of the dead body” (Sandberg, 2003, p. 46). He views as being a means of making good the collective loss (Sandberg, 2003, p. 46). However, in the context of the biographical museums it is more than that: there is a sense that an association with “last moment of presence before death” enables the most direct connection; the last thing worn or the last object touched. It is as though the last moments of the individual could be captured in the objects that surrounded them; the last breath they drew in some way permeated their surroundings or could be contained within objects. This can transform even the object that does not show the wear and tear of use or the imprint of the subject as, for example, the hand or clothing.

Thomas Edison provides an interesting example. He was the inventor of, amongst other things, the cylinder phonograph, invented in 1877, which enabled the recording and replaying of sound. The sound vibrations caused a needle to engrave marks into the tinfoil (later wax), which would later allow a stylus to follow the grooves and repeat the sound back to the listener. Sounds could be repeatedly played back despite the distance between the listener and the original recorded moment, or the person heard in the recording. For later generations these recordings brought the dead back into their living rooms. During a couple of interviews given during the 1920s, Edison expressed an interest in communicating with the dead and said he was inventing a ‘spirit communication device’ (something he later claimed was a prank) (Paranormal-Encyclopedia, 2013; Sconce, 1998, p. 213). In a radio interview, he apparently said,

...I am inclined to believe that our personality hereafter will be able to affect matter. If this reasoning be correct, then, if we can evolve an instrument so delicate as to be affected, moved, or manipulated...by our personality as it survives in the next life, such an instrument, when made available, ought to record something. (Paranormal-Encyclopedia, 2013)

¹² Now in the Museum of London.

¹³ Queen Victoria had it mounted in silver

¹⁴ A display practice that Tussaud also employed, showing authentic belongings along with the wax works (Berridge, 2007).

This has been interpreted as Edison being in favour of recording as a means of communicating with the dead. This story may be apocryphal; however, it is indicative of the popular beliefs of the time concerning the persistence of the human spirit beyond death, and therefore the possibilities of communicating with that distant spirit. The media inventions of the time (wireless, phonographs) were making such a device seem plausible (Sconce, 1998, p. 212).

After death, Edison became the subject of practices like those associated with relics. In a 2004 essay, William Pretzer discusses a glass test tube displayed in the Henry Ford Museum (Figure 4). Its label reads “Edison’s Last Breath” (Pretzer, 2004). The test tube, along with a number of Edison’s personal belongings, was collected by Henry Ford. Pretzer cites one source as saying that Ford believed that the human soul exited the body with the final breath and that he somehow persuaded Edison’s son to ‘collect’ his father’s last breath in a test tube (Pretzer, 2004, p. 680). It seems a little farfetched to believe that Edison’s soul exists in that test tube, but it is an example of Sandberg’s notion of the “energetic investment in the last moment of presence”. It is indicative of Ford’s enthusiasm for Edison, which is also apparent in the transplantation and display of Edison’s laboratory in his museum, mentioned in Chapter Two. Objects could retain the spirit of their former owner and, perhaps, enable contact with them. There are similarities between this Edison ‘spirit bottle’, and artefacts that more usually sit in anthropological collections like the Pitt Rivers which, amongst other things, displays a bottle containing a witch amongst its collection.

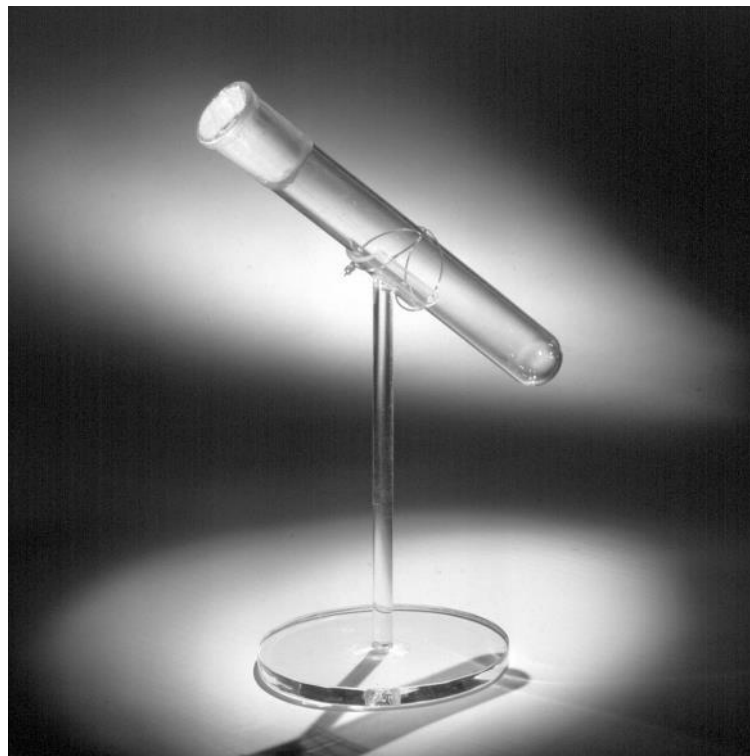


Figure 4 - Edison's breath - from the collections of The Henry Ford.

Edison's recording media are analogous to the way lives can be inscribed upon their objects and surroundings and played back to the modern viewer. The traces of life on objects are akin to the grooves on the wax cylinder which enable posthumous playback. Viewing objects as storage media, that allow contact with the dead, is analogous to the notion of the stored past discussed in Chapter Two. Durham Peters discusses these, then, new forms of media as providing extensions to human faculties. "Each medium...was an attempt to cover a human lack, to fill the gap" (Peters, 1999, p. 219). Nineteenth century storage media, such as the wax cylinder, extended human memory; communication media, such as telegraphy or telephony, providing an extension to the human ear. In both instances, these media allow for communication across spatial and temporal distances. "The far could now speak to the near, and the dead could now speak to the living" (Peters, 1999, p. 138). In effect, this meant that although people were in contact across these distances, they had lost the sense of physical proximity with the other person. The greater the distance between people the greater the desire for proximity: a yearning for the absent other. It is this desire for contact with the absent other that Durham Peters links communication media with contacting the dead. "Indeed all mediated communication is in a sense communication with the dead, insofar as media can store 'phantasm of the living' for playback after bodily death" (Peters, 1999, p. 142). The absent other could be recorded on storage media and appear to be speaking from beyond the grave. If they speak from beyond the grave then later generations could have contact with the dead despite their absence, or temporal distance. If distant voices could be channelled down phone lines, then there might be other means of channelling those absent. Durham Peters describes how this increasing communicatory distance and lack of direct experience led to the creation of compensations for the lack of proximity, including simulations of presence.

At the same time, other forms of contacting people at a distance, specifically the dead, became popular. These concurrent developments and certain similarities of intention link communication media to Spiritualism. Both involved communicating with an absent distant person through a medium who would enable vicarious contact. Spiritualism had come to prominence in America in the early 1850s with the Fox sisters of New York who appeared to be able to talk to the dead through a series of raps created by clicking their toes (Melechi, 2009, p. 161). The practice came to Britain in 1852 and was an instant sensation. Early spirit mediums used printed alphabets which they could wave their fingers over whilst asking questions, until audible taps or table-tilts indicated letters, which spelled out the message (Melechi, 2009, p. 163). This method was superseded by spirit communication through automatic writing and "trance oratory".¹⁵ In both cases, this enabled the sitters (the

¹⁵ In automatic writing, the Spiritualist medium's hand was guided to write by the spirit; and in trance oratory, the medium would channel the spirit, and speak in the voice of the channelled spirit (Melechi, 2009, p. 162).

people seeking contact with the dead) to hear or read their loved ones' words through the Spiritualist medium. In differing forms, the phenomenon became increasingly popular during the rest of the century. From the outset, the Spiritualists adopted the language of the new media to explain what was happening. In Rudyard Kipling's 1902 short story "Wireless", Hertzian waves are used to explain a character's ability to channel the spirit of the poet Keats (Kipling, 1902). Spiritualist mediums tuned into the spiritual telegraph, with its knocks and raps echoing Morse code. The Spiritual Telegraph was also the name of the New York Spiritualist magazine (Peters, 1999, p. 95). Members of the Society for Psychical Research sought to apply scientific method to the study of Spiritualism using quasi-scientific terms to explain what was occurring.

Such perplexing phenomena attracted interest from many well-known figures, both enthusiastic and sceptical. John Ruskin, Lord Tennyson, Rudyard Kipling, Alfred Russel Wallace, Oliver Lodge and Arthur Conan Doyle were amongst those who participated in Spiritualist practices in this period (Lycett, 2008; Sword, 2002, p. 5); whereas figures such as Robert Browning, Charles Dickens, and Henry James took a more sceptical or satirical view. In 1874, Charles Darwin was due to attend a séance alongside George Eliot, amongst others. He did not stay to see any 'phenomena' because he found it "too hot and tiring" but formed his opinion based upon the reports of trusted observers, in the persons of his son and nephew: the conclusion reached was that it was nonsense (Desmond and Moore, 2009, p. 608). Spiritualist communication, or at the least mysterious communication at a distance, also appears as a device in numerous works of fiction towards the end of the nineteenth century: some from believers in Spiritualism and some from authors satirizing the phenomenon.

If the biographical museum connects its audience with the celebrated dead, so did Spiritualism. Communication with the famous dead was practiced from the onset of Spiritualism's popularity. Helen Sword's book *Ghostwriting Modernity* (Sword, 2002) discusses the parallels between Spiritualist mediumship and late nineteenth century discussions about authorship: the sources of writer's inspiration and mediums who channelled dead authors. She states that "...the notion that the great authors of the past might return to inhabit the minds ...of the living is one with which literary sceptics and satirists have had a field day at least since the mid-nineteenth century." (Sword, 2002, p. 33). Mediums were manifesting great writers and artists and claiming the literary works produced during such manifestations were by those subjects. The medium was just that, a medium for their great talent. Their products were both reiterations of existing works and alleged new works, both providing the sitter with insight into their creative process and inspiration. This also encouraged a sense that the sitter themselves could tune in to the source of the subject's inspiration. In this, they share something with biographical museums, especially literary museums.

Towards the end of the century the phenomenon became more tangible as mediums physically manifested spirits through the touch of the spirit, despite the medium's hands and feet being bound. They would also produce ectoplasm from various places on their bodies, ectoplasm being the physical manifestation of spirit. Psychometry also started to play its part. As I suggested earlier, psychometry provides another analogy for thinking about biographical objects, whether bodily or otherwise. The medium could connect with the dead through their former possessions: tuning into the spirit vibrations left on the objects. The object became a conduit (medium) through which to channel the dead and therefore allow communication between the dead and their living sitters. Arthur Conan Doyle wrote several stories about connecting to historical events and people through objects, "The Leather Funnel" and "The Silver Mirror" amongst others. These were discussed in Chapter Two in relation to traces that enable a connection to the past. However, with his profound interest in Spiritualism, these stories can also be read as stories about Spiritualist psychometry: the object providing a medium through which to contact a former owner.

The Edison 'spirit bottle' and Elgar's hand can be considered as similar because they are artefacts for having contact with the dead. In both cases we are using an object as a medium through which to have a sense of contact with the absent other. To stretch the communication technology analogy further: these objects might be both spirit telegraph (conduits for vicarious contact) and spirit recordings (their deathbed histories being available for playback when required). To the sensitive viewer, such objects could carry the frisson of connection.

The Spiritualist medium who practiced psychometry provided a double mediation for the sitter. The connections to the dead subject were being filtered by both human and object. The paradox of Spiritualism was that, despite its focus upon the direct personal experience of the sitter connecting with the dead subject, the experience was maintained by the presence of a "compromising medium" (Sword, 2002, p. 8). Contact through a medium lacks directness; it brings the dead and the living (the speaker and the listener) together whilst simultaneously placing something between them. Further, the process of 'passing over' sometimes had the effect of completely changing opinion or revoking events that occurred during their lifetime. The living sceptic very often in death became the believer, apologising for their scepticism: "Communication with the dead is always, on some level, a repudiation of history, a rebellious attempt to repair the past at the cost of denying the present". (Sword, 2002, p. 47).

For the sceptics the problem with Spiritualism (besides the potential for fakery and its unscientific nature) was that the communication one had with the dead was mediated, inauthentic because it was indirect. The danger with vicarious contact over either spatial or temporal distance is that it could be ventriloquized, as the Highmore quote in the

introduction suggested (Highmore, 2006, p. 24). This is especially true where the subject being contacted is not someone personally known to us.

Similarly, the subject is ventriloquized through the biographical object which provides vicarious contact, but those that seek contact must overlook the hopelessness of their desired communication. The frisson of the uncanny, or perception of the objects aura, will only be affected by this 'hopelessness' if the viewer is fully aware of this possibility or even concerned by it. At a basic level, this is the difference between the believer and the sceptic. Mediation may be a problem for some, but not for others. Different degrees of experience and viewer investment are considered more fully in Chapter Five.

It could be argued that the object in the museum frustrates the desire for contact further by remaining out of reach. Unlike the families of the deceased or, in fact, the spirit medium, we cannot touch the objects. The museum visitor must view the temporally distant from a spatial distance and be content with contacting the subject through a myriad of different exposition techniques (media of communication) discussed in the next section. However, it will be argued that such techniques encourage us to disregard the vicariousness of our contact.

Curation as a Technique for the Creation of Presence or Haunting in Biographical House Museum

If some objects enable a sense of contact with the dead, can the arrangement of such objects in the biographical house museums do the same? Is a sense of haunting possible in the biographical museum? This section will examine the ways in which museum guidance and curation can provide a similar sense of contact with the dead subject. If the problem with the biographical object is that unlike the mourning object, it lacks tactile experience; museum psychometry, like the relic practice of Chapter One, can only be possible through exposition techniques. The visitor does not need a psychic medium to have contact with the subject of the biographical museum so long as these museum practices are effective mediators / mediums.¹⁶ The museum object relies upon the methods of curation to enable a sense of the subject's presence in the museum; the dead subject is manifested through forms of simulated presence. More than that, the museum uses what Sandberg describes as resurrection strategies to attempt a form of corporeal

¹⁶ In 2006, the artist Cornelia Parker brought the Spiritualist world and the biographical museum together by asking two psychics to read the Bronte Parsonage, which she recorded for part of the exhibition. She said she had "burning questions building up in [her] mind and [she] couldn't use science to find the answers, so to ask those questions of a psychic seemed to be an interesting experiment" (Parker, 2006, p. 34)(although Parker calls them psychics they were connecting to the Bronte's lives in the ways a medium would have). Their responses to the rooms gave details of the Brontë sisters' everyday and emotional lives.

restoration of the subject, which enable the visitor a sense of proximity (Sandberg, 2003, p. 179). These strategies are found in the period rooms or missing person displays, previously discussed in chapter three, which recreated the subject's homes. This chapter will extend those resurrection strategies to include exposition in the form of audio or narrated guidance.

Museum guidance refers both to human museum guides and the audio (and audio-visual) guides that have become ubiquitous in recent years. If objects can be like a wax cylinder recording, enabling playback despite the biographical subject's absence, then the use of audio material could not only supplement but also augment the experience of contact with the dead. Most biographical museums supplement their curation and interpretation material with individual audio (and increasingly audio-visual) gadgets. For example, Down House uses electronic guides, hand-held devices resembling a Smartphone that use both audio and visual material to supplement the visitor's experience of the house, whereas the Elgar birthplace uses a simple audio guide with headphones.

There have been arguments made about the pros and cons of audio guides and more recently electronic guidebooks. These concern themselves with the apparent problem of the isolation of the individual visitor from other visitors through the use of headphones and the potential for distraction through the use of guides (Aoki, et al., 2002; Woodruff, et al., 2001). The latter is not particularly relevant in this chapter. However, it can be argued that, rather than being a problem, the former aids the simulation of the museum subject's presence which in turn might enable, if not a sense of haunting then a sense of proximity. In other words, whilst for these writers this isolation is a problem, in the biographical museum it is of benefit. The effect of the audio guide is to close down or reduce the world of the visitors. They are isolated from their companions by the commentary coming from the headphones, individualising their experience in the museum and creating a more intimate relation between them and the object or room. This in turn enables the creation of a more intimate space through which to connect with the subject. It can also make the museum into a library-like (or church-like) space in which conversation is minimal or is conducted in whispers. This compensates for the bustle in a popular biographical museum like Down House where other visitors can seem like intruders on your experience of the museum.

The Elgar Birthplace Museum audio guide prompts the visitors to select tracks according to small numbered cards placed in various places throughout the visitor centre and birthplace. Each cabinet has at least one object numbered for narration through the audio guide. The commentary includes biographic and musicological detail, depending on

the object highlighted. Perhaps inevitably, this guide uses Elgar's music as a large portion of its material. This results in certain objects and their associated life events being linked with particular pieces of music. One of the objects so highlighted is a wooden cabinet gramophone player in the study of the Elgar Birthplace.¹⁷ Elgar was given gramophones as part of his close working relationship with the Gramophone Company (later HMV). The small card on the surface tells us that the gramophone was one of several he owned (Figure 5). The record on the turntable is of *Salut D'amour* by Elgar. The gramophone lies silent for most of the time the museum is open, except for some school visits: "...one of the highlights of a school visit as a member of the Museum's team winds the player up and carefully swings the needle over. For our younger visitors it is something truly astonishing!" (Duffy, 2014). The sound of Elgar's music would emerge from the speakers. The first thing to be noticed by the visitor might be the quality of sound: the difference between the rhythmic



Figure 5 - Elgar's gramophone. Photograph: Caroline Morris

¹⁷ The significance of which was acknowledged by the museum when they chose it as their contribution to the website version of the BBC's History of the World in 100 objects.
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/ahistoryoftheworld/objects/KfjHzGabTBSXBptaTsmrQQ>

beat of the gramophone's action underlying the music and the crisp interference-free sounds of a digital recording.¹⁸

Both the audio guide and the gramophone perform similar roles in not only informing the visitor about the man and his music, but also creating atmosphere. They both create the conditions conducive to the simulation of presence. The wax cylinder, which provided an analogy for the impress of the past (the life) onto objects for later playback, is allowed to play. In the background of music played on such a gramophone one can hear regular whispering; in the biographical house museum this becomes like the whispers of the dead. Old recordings can have that effect. Early recording technology was used to preserve the voices of figures such as Tennyson and Yeats reading their own poetry. Today, there is something in the quality of such recording that seems uncanny, if not haunting. In fact, recording media have their very own field of spirit-raising. From the outset, people have heard extraneous voices in recordings, interpreting background noises as communications from the dead. In recent years, this has been called E.V.P., or Electronic Voice Phenomena. Voices of the dead come back to the living in the rhythmical hissings and whispers of early recordings.

However, even away from the antique playback, the use of Elgar's music through the audio guide, especially those recordings which he conducted himself, provide contact and therefore proximity: a playback of frozen time. In his examination of the broadcast communication technology, Durham Peters discusses how the problem of distance was compensated for through techniques to simulate proximity.

New forms of authenticity, intimacy and touch not based on immediate physical presence had to be found. The hunt for communicative prostheses – compensations for lost presences... (Peters, 1999, p. 214)

He cites examples like the use of a conversational or personal tone in broadcasts to simulate inclusion and proximity despite their mass audience. However, despite this referring to broadcast media, recorded media such as a gramophone record or an audio guide also provide compensations for lost presence and simulate the presence enabling proximity.

This idea is neatly summarised in "The Adventure of the Mazarin Stone" in which Holmes retires to his room to play the violin, leaving his suspects in the drawing room (Doyle, 2011). In his absence, they discuss their plan and reveal the location of a stolen jewel. Holmes hears everything and they are astounded by his sudden appearance because they had heard Holmes playing his violin from the other room. The recorded

¹⁸ The latter would be what Elgar was used to, although it is probable that he would have appreciated the advances in technology: he embraced the new technologies of his time.

presence of Holmes conjured his presence in a place other than his actual location, simulating his presence and causing the suspects to infer that Holmes could not eavesdrop.

In other words, in the biographical museums of figures such as Elgar or Darwin, audio media allows the listener to infer a presence even in the absence of the sound's originator. The dead subject is resurrected through the commentary fed through the audio guide. The effect that the recorded sound has in creating a sense of presence does rely upon the type of audio source used and the receptivity of the visitor, but it can simulate the subject's presence, sound uncanny and, as they are a dead subject, simulate haunting. This is especially the case when enhanced by biographically associative location and with the curation of associative objects.

In one of the rooms in the Milton cottage near Chalfont St. Giles, the visitor is invited to push a button beside a mantelpiece. When pressed, the room is filled with the sound of a male voice reading a portion of *Paradise Lost*. The impression of a disembodied voice, emanating from a low ceilinged and dimly lit cottage, is unnerving. There is no pretence that it was Milton speaking, however; the impression it had is indicative of the 'playback after death' effect and the role audio visual material can play in the manifestation of the subject. Whilst such techniques are used by most museums, their use by biographical museums provides a more specific sense of presence and proximity because they are associated to a specific figure.

Audio tales can guide a visitor through cabinets in such a way as to conjure the subject in their minds, especially in conjunction with recorded examples of the subject's work. This is true of museums like the Elgar Birthplace that do not use missing person display and thus do not benefit from the affective tricks that that encourages (discussed later in this chapter). Audio materials provide a useful tool for the simulation of proximity in the biographical museum. A primary part of the simulation of presence through museum guidance comes from the kinds of narration allowed in the museum. Whilst the audio guide can give the required information as well as the subject's creative output, as with Elgar, the skilled guide could bring museum guidance from a means of conveying information to something that more closely resembles storytelling, although I suspect that to be rare.

In the Henry James short story "The Birthplace" (1903), a thinly veiled satire about 'bardolatry' and the Shakespeare birthplace, the new custodian, Gedge, struggles with the spiel with which he guides his visitors. It seems to him to be closer to anecdote or hearsay than authenticated information. However, as he amends and qualifies the tour script, the visitors dwindle. They prefer it when he weaves stories about the subject, filling the virtually empty spaces with spectral presences. He walks the house when the visitors have gone and feels that he can "recover some echo" or find the "*genius loci*". More than that, he feels that he is brought closer to the "enshrined Presence" which "enlarged the opportunity for

communion” and intensified the sense of it (James, 1903, p. 169). On the one hand, he resents the visitor (“Them”) for their insensitivity and for interfering with his communion with “Him” (the subject) but, on the other towards the end of the story, the stories he weaves about Shakespeare’s early life in the house conjure the playwright for the visitor and provide a sense of proximity.

His stories perform a similar function to a well-told ghost story in creating the possibility for haunting. The subject is ‘brought to life’ or resurrected. This story in part reiterates the usefulness of isolation in the experience of the “enshrined presence”; it also shows the evocative power of biographic narrative, especially embellished anecdote, in conjunction with associated objects and places to conjure the presence of the subject. In this story, the custodian goes further by embellishing beyond the fact, something that the visitors lap up. This could imply that the best way of conjuring the subject’s presence is to make things up in this way. However, I would suggest that, by allowing the narratives of daily use to emerge in story-form, the visitor may be better able to gain a sense of the subject.

Besides the intervention of the audio or tour guide, those museums that choose to curate their objects as if still in use (using what Sandberg terms “missing person display”) provide another means of connecting with the subject (2003). The arrangement of objects in a missing person display provides a further resurrection strategy, a means of manifesting their spectral subjects (Sandberg, 2003, p. 216). Whilst the audio guide can directly resurrect the absent subject through playback of their voice, or less directly through stories of their daily activities, curation using missing person display figuratively resurrects the absent subject. The missing person approach plays upon the notion that objects *in-situ* with the correct contextual surroundings will more easily allow connection to the distant times they represent. More than that, however, the curation of the object in use in the absence of the subject can give the impression of a stilled moment whilst paradoxically also giving the impression that the subject could return (Sandberg, 2003, p. 247). In this way, the display can both confirm and deny the subject’s distance from the visitor.

For example, the apartment in which the playwright Henrik Ibsen lived for many decades, and in which his wife continued to inhabit after his death, is now a museum in central Oslo (Figure 6). The curators have carefully reconstructed the home, as it would have been during Ibsen’s time there, in part through photographs: from drawing rooms and study to bedrooms and bathrooms (Figure 7). There is an exhibition space on the ground floor, but the first floor apartment itself is furnished with a mixture of authentic Ibsen objects



Figure 6 - Ibsen's Apartment building. Photograph: Caroline Morris

and carefully researched replicas. All the rooms, except the study, can be walked through by the visitors. The study doors have Perspex across them so one can only stand and look through rather than enter. Visitor numbers are restricted and every group is guided through by a member of staff.¹⁹ Despite the busy road outside, the apartment remains cool and quiet. Like other houses, it is curated as though Ibsen had just stepped out of the apartment. The signs that it is ready for his return come from his bed being turned down ready for him, and papers gathered on his desk in anticipation of his return to work. His wife certainly anticipated his return: she refused to have electricity put into the flat because she believed that Ibsen's spirit returned to her and communicated through the gas light (*Ibsens Badekar: Ibsen's Bath, 2006*).

Mark Sandberg opens his 2003 book with a description of a table that is permanently reserved for a missing person. During the 1890's, Ibsen would walk to the Grand Café in central Oslo punctually at noon, always sitting at the same table reading a paper and drinking an aperitif. The hotel displays his hat, cane, newspaper and reading glasses with the table and chair. For Sandberg, this little display in the hotel is an evocative contemporary example of the missing person displays of his research. The implication of

¹⁹ The visitor is also asked to wear plastic over shoes, which put me in mind of a crime scene examiner.



Figure 7 - Ibsen's Drawing room - still from Ibsen's Badekar directed by Erling Borgen (2006).

the modern display at the Grand Café is that the hotel is expecting Ibsen to return at any time to claim his reserved table (Sandberg, 2003, p. 1).

This anticipatory technique is employed in many museums and some go further in this suggested return. There is a table-lamp left on in each room at Down House, something that also occurs in many National Trust houses. During the winter, the 'housemaids' light the fires in Holmes' living room at 221b Baker Street (Figure 8), providing not only warmth but also a sense of cosiness ready for the inhabitant to return. This gives the impression that the spaces are still lived-in, despite their fictional origin.

However, the most frequent sign of life comes from ticking clock. Clocks are one of the very few objects that still have to perform their original function, something that is counter to the conservation principles which otherwise dominate museums: one should arrest their decay, as discussed in Chapter Two. However, with a stopped clock the house would truly seem to be in the frozen moment.²⁰ Unlike in Chapter Two where period room displays were as if a frozen moment of time, like a fossil of how the subject used to live, these kind of curated rooms are filled, if not with ghosts, then with the possibility of imminent return. The ticking clock prevents the rooms becoming dead spaces and therefore contributes to the sense of continuity of living: the subject's imminent return. Whilst this potentiality could

²⁰ "...with clocks stopped throughout the houses, the houses would have a very dead feeling ...there's something very emotive, I think, about a stopped clock..." (Big Spring Clean: Petworth House, 2011).



Figure 8 - Drawing room of 221b Baker Street. Photograph: Caroline Morris

create a sense of proximity, it is still an absence. In fact, it is a reiteration of absence: the subject could come back but, in the fact of their potentially coming back, they are absent from the scene.

In relation to missing person displays, Sandberg uses the analogy of “Goldilocks and the Three Bears”. This story, he states, addresses many of the issues connected to missing person display,

...the evocative power of metonymic corporeal traces, the sense of boundary transgression, the visitor’s irresistible urge to experience private space as an original inhabitant, the temptation to use items that should only be observed, and the tendency to measure one’s body against those of the missing persons while in the space (Sandberg, 2003, p. 245).

If the subject may return at any time, then not only is there a frisson of potential discovery, walking around their house, but also the potential for communication or contact with the dead subject. With the dead subject, unlike Goldilocks’ case, they could not literally return to inhabit the home and the notion of imminent return might seem as fictitious as the bear family. Yet it chimes with nineteenth-century euphemisms for death. The phrase “Death is

nothing at all, I have only slipped away into the next room”²¹ (Holland, 2013) was used in a published sermon by Henry Scott Holland, a canon of St Paul’s cathedral in 1910; and Helen Keller is quoted as saying “Death is no more than passing from one room into another” (Keller, 2013).

However, absence creates gaps. In Chapter Three, I examined the way that Darwin’s study had been built up with objects so that it appeared to outline him. This was about practicality, enabling him not to have to leave his chair when unwell. This outlining of his form in objects, the mould for him to protect himself, is now an empty shell. By curating this shell, the museum curates his potential presence. Sandberg refers to an old definition of the word effigy: the verb ‘to effigy’,²² to “body forth” (Sandberg, 2003, p. 5). Referring to Ibsen’s reserved table, he says “[Ibsen’s] corporeal form is outlined not by flesh, bone and skin but by the array of objects and clothing that mark the boundaries of where it should be, but is not “ (Sandberg, 2003, p. 4). The object which appears as if still in regular use provides an outline of the absent form that, in turn, aids the viewer’s imagination to populate the scene in front of them. The viewer’s imagination fills the gaps enabling the manifestation of the absent subject: the subject is effigied. The manifestation of the subject in the imagination is enhanced by the traces of use showing where the subject has been.

...power of metonymic trace to evoke a powerful sense of imaginary effigy... Each mark, scrape and worn plank bears mute witness to the absent to the absent body that imprinted itself on its environments, and the sense of former presence assures the viewer that the room is genuine (Sandberg, 2003, p. 216)

If the traces of use left on objects in the display are regarded as the points on which regular pressure was exerted, they not only give a more detailed outline of the subject but they give movement to the outlining provided by the curation. Darwin’s mould is not only created from the objects with which he surrounded himself, but also by the imprint of his legs on the chair and the wear on its arms.

Sandberg does not link this effigy technique to biographical objects or museums beyond the Ibsen chair.²³ However, in museums where every trace can be an evocative sign of the absent subject, this notion is especially fruitful. The imaginatively effigied, absent subject provides the museum with its potential for haunting. The museum, in its creation, provides those gaps into which the visitor can imaginatively fill with the subject of the museum. Whilst some museums might attempt to fill some of the gaps themselves with wax figures or

²¹ Henry Scott Holland (1847-1918) ‘The King of Terrors’, a sermon on death delivered in St Paul’s Cathedral on Whitsunday 1910, while the body of King Edward VII was lying in state at Westminster

²² A notion also used by Virginia Woolf with regard to the Victorian biographical subject (Woolf, 1939, p. 117), see Chapter Three.

²³ Although it is interesting that he chose to start his book with this evocative example.

projections,²⁴ in the dominant mode of missing person display it is those imaginative presences that haunt the biographical museum.

Through these resurrection strategies of narration and curation, the biographical museum conjures their subject, providing the potential for a sense of contact with the dead, which is reliant on the complicity of the visitors. Whilst these reconstructed houses do provide the stimulation for the ghosts of their subjects, they may be the ghosts of the visitor's imaginative impressions of the subject. A sense of haunting is contingent upon the engagement of the visitor: for one person a visit to Broadheath or Down is a touristic exercise; to another it is the opportunity to walk in the subject's footsteps.

Visitor Re-enactments of Biographical Subject's Activities as a Technique for Possible Contact

I have considered the biographical object as a medium through which individuals could connect with the dead subject and the museum as a means of contact with the dead through its use of curatorial resurrection strategies and the possibility of haunting. This chapter now turns its focus to the manifested subject, the analogy of the subject as contactable spectre and how contact might work in the museum. It examines how certain visitor actions in the museum might provide a means of connection with the biographical subject. In order to do this, it will consider examples of behaviour and responses.

The visitor's image of the subject of a biographical museum is probably based upon portraiture, whether painted or photographic. In some circumstances, when it is a more modern subject then they may have been filmed, providing viewers with a moving image of the subject. For example, in the Elgar Birthplace there is cine film or, in a different way, in Down House there is a hologram of a Darwin lookalike in the Beagle cabin. So, when presented with the reconstructed homes, one can put a name to a face. However, any more than that is an act of great imagination. With what then does one fill the "evocative concavities"²⁵ of the missing person display?

The sense of the subject's absent presence in the museum is based upon the shapes left behind and reconstructed in the museum. Articles of clothing, like shed skins, are displayed in museums like Kelmscott Manor and Doughty Street. For example, William Morris' coat hung up in the hall of Kelmscott, as if ready to be put on. These are not the ghosts of the museum, but a form of potential embodied presence. Clothes like this coat

²⁴ Down House has a video projection of a Darwin look alike at work in a recreated Beagle cabin: even to modern eyes, it is an unnerving sight.

²⁵ Sandberg describes a Danish museum as being "... filled with evocative concavities, body-shaped indentations in the space that encouraged imagination of the missing person" (Sandberg, 2003, p. 218).

provide both the evocative quality of the habitually worn as well as a form for the imagination to fill, the spatial effigy with which to picture the subject. In museums such as the Bronte parsonage, the Dickens museum and the Jane Austen house the visitor can view the subject's clothes on mannequins of the right size. These headless effigies provide at least a form with which to populate the living spaces. However, the overwhelming impression given on viewing the Charlotte Bronte mannequin is not its being a means of picturing the woman, so much as its diminutive size. The dress on its mannequin shows how tiny she was and the inevitable response is to compare oneself to it, and in doing so we place ourselves in direct relation to her.

This is what Mark Sandberg described as part of his Goldilocks analogy where he described a visitor's urge to "measure [their] body against [that] of the missing persons while in the space" (Sandberg, 2003, p. 245). This impulse, as he describes it, does not precisely bring the biographical subject into proximity with the visitor because they have to remain physically distant from the objects whilst seeking the comparison. Rarely does the visitor get the chance to, literally, stand in for a dead subject unless they gaze out of the windows their heroes gazed out of or walk the same paths.²⁶ They cannot sit in Dickens chair or try on Morris' coat. Therefore, to achieve both the comparison (and the potential for commonality between visitor and subject, a sense of connection) the viewer has to project themselves into the subject's absence.

Comparison can also be a response to the "evocative concavities" that the museum curates for the public in the missing person display. The size and potential comfort of items of furniture in houses like Morris's provide a topic of conversation between companions.²⁷ The curation creates "...an evocatively empty space that encourages [the viewer] to perform the imaginative substitution of bodies..." (Sandberg, 2003, p. 2). By imaginatively stepping into the subject's shoes, then the visitor could achieve a more intimate connection with them, being at once both onlooker and participant in the subject's life. The irony is that any attempt to fill the gap will only ever be an approximation, as the adaptations made to the objects and spaces by the subject are unique, but the impulse remains. The very thing, that makes these objects special and prompts the impulse to compare, is the thing that keeps the visitor at a distance from both the object and the subject they wish to connect with, something that again shows the auratic nature of these objects.

²⁶ During her bike trip around the Isle of Wight, Clare Balding sat in a chair at a desk gazing out of the same window that Dickens' had looked out of whilst writing *David Copperfield* (*Britain by Bike*, 2010).

²⁷ I witnessed an example of the tendency to measure one's body against those of the missing persons while in the space during a visit to William Morris' former residence, Kelmscott Manor. The elaborately Arts and Crafts decorated four poster bed dominates Morris' bedroom. Whilst viewing this partial missing person display I overheard a conversation between the couple who were looking around just ahead of me. They were discussing the length and relative comfort of the bed (without touching it). They were imaginatively putting themselves into Morris' life experience through his bed: measuring their bodies against his.

The key point here is that through the use of missing person display, the biographical museum encourages both this practice of comparison and the imaginary substitution of bodies. In desiring their visitors to feel at home with the subject, they are encouraging them to picture themselves with the subject; more than that, to put themselves into their shoes. These acts of comparison and substitution connect the biographical house museum to the more long-standing practices of literary tourism. The notion of walking in the footsteps of a celebrated individual has lain at the heart of literary tourism from its inception. The impulse to retrace footsteps is apparent through many sources from the literary tourism of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, to the work of biographers like Richard Holmes in his book *Footsteps* (2005) and more recently to You Tube videos. The modern biographical museum encourages such retracing and imaginative projections outside its confines. For example, in Oslo, an inlaid Ibsen quote in the pavement encourages the visitor to follow his regular route from the apartment to the Grand Café. In Worcestershire, the visitor can follow the Elgar Route which is a vast tour of the Malvern countryside that Elgar loved and said he would haunt after his death.²⁸ One can walk where the subject would have regularly walked.



Figure 9 - The Sandwalk Path. Photograph: Caroline Morris

²⁸ He said of the theme from the Cello concerto “if ever you’re walking on the Malvern Hills and hear that, don’t be frightened...it’s only me” (Moore, 2004, p. 202).

This act of retracing the subject's footsteps and some of their significant routines, performing a re-enactment, is another form of imaginary substitution of bodies. It not only brings the visitor in to an apparently closer association with the subject, but also simulates presence. Take, for example, the Sandwalk²⁹ (or thinking path) a circular path in a 1¼-acre site close by Down House constructed by Darwin shortly after moving to Down (Figures 9-10). Every day at noon, Darwin would walk around the path thinking over his ideas (Keynes, 2009, p. 92). In order to regulate his thinking time, he would place five flints on one side of the beginning of the path and at the end of each rotation of the spinney path, he would kick a flint away across to the other side of the path; he would repeat this five times until all the flints had been moved. This was his habit for forty years. In addition, the Sandwalk is connected to his final days since it is the place where the first sign of his final illness appeared whilst making one of his daily circuits (Keynes, 2009, p. 291). As mentioned earlier, the inscription of the subject's final breath could signify something with biographical signification.



Figure 10 - The Sandwalk Path. Photograph: Caroline Morris

²⁹ It has been argued that it was this local landscape which provided as much material for *On the Origin of Species* as the Beagle voyage had (Desmond and Moore, 2009; Jones, 2009; Reeve, 2009).

For Darwin's family, after his death, the Sandwalk became a place to remember him. According to Ety, her mother had herself wheeled to the Sandwalk rather than attend his funeral at Westminster Cathedral (Keynes, 2009, p. 293). The sense of the Sandwalk feeling haunted was definitely felt by his descendants.

Francis [Darwin's 3rd son] remembered that, he walked with a swinging walk using a walking stick heavily shod with iron which he struck loudly against the ground. The rhythmic click 'became a familiar sound that spoke of his presence near us', and it haunted the Sandwalk for them long after his death. (Keynes, 2009, p. 92)

Darwin's repetitive habits meant that his image could readily be recalled in memory by his surviving family and friends. However, they had the living memories with which to resurrect him and achieved a sense of contact. In the context of the biographical museum discussed so far, contact between the visitor and Darwin might appear problematic. His wear of the path is not visible. It is not contained in a form that might be evocative of him, like a lock of hair or the curated absences of the missing person display. Yet, through the imaginary substitution of bodies, there is at least a possibility of simulating (or manifesting) his presence. This would be prompted by the known association and its many Darwin anecdotes, in conjunction with the carefully placed flints³⁰ and the direct access the walker can have to the path (unlike with his objects). The Sandwalk is an example of how a place,



Figure 11 - You Tube video 're-enactment' - https://youtu.be/v3v_lhZ_92w

³⁰ Although they are almost certainly not the originals, as one could imagine that, even if the years before its creation as a popular tourist destination would have made their loss inevitable, they would probably have been pocketed by souvenir hunters long ago. The flints I saw may well have been left over from one of the numerous Darwin documentaries that were filmed on the Sandwalk during the bicentenary year.

not just a reconstructed house, could enable a sense that it is haunted by the presence of its former user.

There is no way of knowing how many visitors have circled the spinney five times in direct recreation of his habit, but the impetus is there. By walking the path, a visitor might hope to communicate with Darwin through their re-enactment of his practices. If you perform a YouTube search on a biographical museum, you will come across videos taken in and around the museum by visitors from all nationalities (Figure 11).³¹ They all have certain things in common: most are documenting their visits, whether using video or a slide show of photographs, some of which are taken illicitly. Some choose stirring music as a background, whilst many others produce their own commentary recorded either live or afterwards. In most cases, the visitors sit or stand in locations that the museum subject had and, in some cases, they put themselves into the scene. Similarly, there are a number of blogs which document visitor's walks, and thinking along with their imagined subject. These blogs have titles which either sound like companionable travelogues (walking with ...) or adoring pilgrimages.³²

Other websites also document visits, in common with other videos and blogs. These document their visit to Down House (excluding the house where photography is banned). The writers walk the path whilst telling us all about Darwin's habits, imitating some kind of Darwin documentary. Some, however, approach the documenting of the walk more experientially. For example, one video's subtitled commentary includes this statement.

I wanted to walk his famous Sandwalk - his "thinking path." I wanted to walk it the same way Darwin did and to think the same deep thoughts. Looking at the path, however, I started to wonder: ...Darwin is my hero and walking (and running) his path will forever be one of my most memorable life events.³³

Some go further in their re-enactment, not just seeking to walk the path but to recreate the conditions of his thinking.

Before the three of us entered the path, I insisted that we all sit on an outdoor bench and contemplate. The goal was for each of us to put in mind a scientific question that we were then struggling with — a question that would require some new insight in order for us to pursue any farther...Each of us then walked the Sand Path once round, in isolation, contemplating our question. I came up with no insights, but no matter. I had performed the very same action that Darwin had done himself so many times, so I was in bliss.³⁴

³¹<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CJe2q0bNvAw> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oD6SkWcLomU>
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v3v_lhZ_92w http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_KnZ9Sp9RbQ
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VqKcV41uJJI> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vRPreB8o78o>

³² <http://communicatescience.com/zoonomian/2012/11/05/a-visit-to-great-malvern-and-annie-darwins-grave/> <http://davidnice.blogspot.co.uk/2011/03/five-times-round-sand-walk.html>

³³ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v3v_lhZ_92w

³⁴ <http://www.thegreatstory.org/downhouse.html>

Again, these acts are closely related to the visitor measuring themselves against the gaps left by the subject. They are inserting *themselves* into the subject's world, looking to possess the spaces in which they lived.

One might expect professional scientists to have a more rational response to such a walk, yet they follow in his footsteps with similar impulses to put themselves in his place. For example, Darwin scholar Professor David Kohn says "We the subsequent generation love the Sandwalk because we can imagine Darwin on it...and think about what he can see in the Sandwalk..." (*Darwin's Struggle*, 2009). To walk the Sandwalk is to walk in Darwin's footsteps, to see what he saw when thinking about his theories; it is a way of understanding him and is also apparent in the house through its methods of recreation.

What form of contact might these example re-enactors have? The references above, to seeing what he saw and thinking where he had thought, suggest that by metaphorically being in the subject's shoes, the visitor not only fills the gap left by the absent subject, but also attempts a form of mediumship; they hope to conjure the spirit of Darwin by walking the path. This strategy can only allow communication with the subject that will always be unrequited, a monologue. It only enables the possibility of speaking for Darwin rather than as him. The contact is by proxy and that proxy is singularly ill-fitted for returning a response from Darwin or from any other subject whose actions one recreates.

This mediated contact must be, in essence, some form of communication and for that to answer the viewer's desires, there must be something to be gained. In the Henry James story discussed earlier, the custodian Gedge walks the house alone looking to have contact with the spirit of the Birthplace. "He had to take it as the place where the spirit would most walk and where he would therefore be most to be met, with possibilities of recognition and reciprocity (James, 1903, p. 170). In walking in the subject's footsteps, Gedge is looking not only to contact the *genius loci* but is looking for reciprocity in that contact. In looking for insight into subjects like Darwin, the effusive re-enactors above may also be looking for reciprocity. Gedge is looking for a sense of presence by walking in those footsteps which might be considered a form of reciprocity. However, the use of the word recognition does suggest a desire for more than a sense of presence. He is looking to commune with the spirit: to talk with, rather than at, the dead subject. This implies a dialogue. By walking where the spirit would most walk, Gedge is hoping for reciprocal communication with him, a dialogue. If that is what our YouTube walkers want from their re-enactment, how can they achieve reciprocal communication?

Durham Peters employs the phrase "dialogues with the dead" to describe communication at a distance (1999) because reciprocal communication was a problem from early on especially in recording and transmission media (radio etc.). Each medium enabled a sense of contact or proximity with somebody at a distance but the communication

was one way. As such, it still left the listener at a distance and dissociated from direct experience of the source of the transmission or recording. Despite the medium being a compensatory prosthesis for the absent other, the gap remains. The absence of a responder is a gap to be overcome. This lack creates a desire: a lack of reciprocal contact creating yearning for such contact. The answer was simulated dialogue. The simulation of proximity as a compensation for distance requires the simulation of a dialogue. The new media that emerged out of the nineteenth century involved simulated dialogue over distance without any possibility of direct contact. He cites examples like phone-ins and conversational tone in the early radio broadcasts where “dialogic forms were another technique of simulating presence” (Peters, 1999, p. 216), something he calls compensatory dialogism (Peters, 1999, p. 214).³⁵ Reciprocity within communication resulted in a greater sense of direct contact or presence in absence: a manifestation of the absent subject and interaction with the distant subject. He says that “all mediated communication is in a sense communication with the dead” (Peters, 1999, p. 142).

The problem is that the dead might be able to speak to the living through recorded media, whether new media or object, but nothing can flow in return. Likewise, the living can speak to the dead but there can be no reply. The Spiritualists might appear to get around this, yet there is still a medium between the dead and the living relative who wishes a dialogue with them. Therefore, similar kinds of compensatory dialogism need to occur. The human spirit medium allows a perception of dialogue but rather than the chatty tone of the radio, they might attempt to mimic the voice (or some other mimicry) that convinces the sitter that it is really their relative speaking.

This may seem entirely unlikely but Durham Peters argues that in the gap between giving and receiving during communication at a distance (especially temporal) “the speaker must hold up both ends of the conversation...the call must contain or anticipate a response” (Peters, 1999, p. 152). He says that media have transformed types of communication that we have, such that communication is “fundamentally interpretive rather than dialogic” (Peters, 1999, p. 150).

Perhaps all dialogue involves each partner’s enacting the response of the other. Dialogic ideology keeps us from seeing that expressive acts occurring over distances and without immediate assurance of reply can be daring acts of dignity. That I cannot engage in dialogue with Plato or the Beatles does not demean the contact I have with them. Such contact may be hermeneutic and aesthetic rather than personal or mutual. (Peters, 1999, p. 152)

³⁵ Others call this “phatic communication” or “phatic communion” – cf. Frosh, Paul. (2012). The Showing of Sharedness: Monstration, Media and Social Life. *Divinatio*, 35. pp, 123-138; Scannell, P. (2000). ‘For-anyone-as-someone Structures.’ *Media, Culture and Society*, 22(1). pp,5-24.

Therefore, dialogue over a distance involves some simulation or use of the imagination to compensate for the gap between the participants something that, to a sceptic, might have the ring of ventriloquism, as discussed earlier.

Whilst the compensations for absence may be clear in the missing person display or the audio-visual guides, the dialogic compensations are less overt. Could the missing person display's simulation of presence, or the substitution strategy, provide a source for a simulated dialogue, communicatory prostheses that allow vicarious contact? How can we have reciprocal contact with a dead museum subject? Darwin cannot reply to the visitor's questions and neither can his objects, except through the mechanisms of the museum and extensive research by his biographers. Once the ghost is manifested by the imagination then a form of dialogue may be possible. The reconstruction of the living space allows the phantasm of the living and the prompting of viewer imagination is what creates the playback. For the visitor to preserved living space museums such as Down House, the impossibility of dialogue (of reciprocal communication) is something to be ignored, or conveniently overlooked, although it is something of which the viewer must be aware.

Dialogue involves response or, at least, the expectation of a response. So, perhaps the visitor might be offered the impression of dialogue, the possibility of dialogue or rather an imagined response to the viewers' enquiring gaze. The visitor who wants a form of dialogue with the biographical museum subject is required to become a medium, contacting with the dead subject. The visitor practices a form of mediumship involving a simulated question and answer session with the subject in the visitor imagination: enacting the response of the museum subject in an echo of early Spiritualist practices using raps.

The compensation comes from the imagination and the actions the visitor is encouraged to make. If we walk the walk in his footsteps, we are both the man and his interviewer. A form of dialogue occurs by this adoption of his person despite the impossibility of any reply. By picturing themselves in the subject's shoes, they go beyond enacting a response. Durham Peters' idea that we enact the response of the absent other can be extended to walking in the footsteps of historic subjects. However, the success of this strategy is heavily reliant on both the complicity of the visitors (as it was with the resurrection strategies), the habits of the subjects and the importance placed upon the subject by society.

I began with the question as to whether the display of contiguously associated objects within the reconstructed homes of the dead subject could enable a sense of connection, or contact, with the subject. I wanted to broach the thorny problem of, if not the supernatural, then the profoundly superstitious basis for certain biographical museum phenomena. These objects and houses can provoke a frisson of something in the viewer (though not

every one of them). Perhaps only in this ghostly context could this something-ness be explained.

The connection to death and mourning provides one way of understanding that frisson, but it also comes with problems. Biographical objects are material memories, created from the premise that objects can provide a connection with the dead. The difficulty comes when those material memories cannot conjure personal memories of the deceased, but are still required to prompt a connection. However, in some viewers, the impulse to reach out to a specific past through objects is strong enough to overlook this. The analogy of Spiritualist conjuring of spirits is a tempting one, but difficult to prove; the visitor cannot handle the objects as the medium would in psychometry.

Narrative exposition, which helped conjure the necessary awe from pilgrims in Chapter One, partially explains this something-ness. Audio guides or expert narrative can simulate presence or rather stimulate the imagination into resurrecting the subject. Further, the curation using missing person display simulates presence. The sense of imminent return and the “evocative concavities” could provide the frisson of the absent presence but this is not enough to create haunted spaces. If one wants a similar experience to Gedge in James’ story “The Birthplace”, to have a sense of and even walk with the “enshrined presence”, then do we, like him, need isolation? To walk alone through Ibsen’s apartment or even Down House these resurrection strategies could work on our senses and give the impression of haunted space. To walk through these spaces amongst numbers of other people, the sense of connection may be dependent upon the will or motivation of the visitor.

Those that faithfully trudge the Sandwalk may just be following the guidebook suggestion, but there are definitely some who seek out these walks to gain something. They may not be walking with the ghostly subject; they may sometimes be walking with other visitors, but the sense one has from the examples shown is that to have walked the Sandwalk is to know something more of Darwin than one knew before. By walking, these visitors are seeking to get to know, to make his acquaintance. Re-enactment enables a sense of contact through shared experience with the subject despite the communication one can have being almost certainly ventriloquised. Therefore, the question as to whether the museum and its objects could enable a sense of contact with the dead subject can be answered as yes. However, the sort of contact that the viewer has is dependent upon the visitor who seeks it out.

Chapter Five

Between the Secular Relic and the Viewing Pilgrim: Viewer Attachment and the Creation of Empathetic Engagement

The museum influences the way a viewer reads the biographical object, through curation and narrative exposition. However, what became clear over the course of this research is that the biographical object and its display are subject to shifts in the relationship between the biographical museum subject, their objects and the museum viewer. The preceding chapters examined objects and their display as a means of questioning their comparison with the relic and understanding their existence in the modern museum. They have shown the ways in which these objects are narrated by their display, something which, in the period room reconstruction becomes a representation of both creative labours and home life. The reconstructed sites are storytellers manifesting and offering insight into the subject through their objects.

However, the effectiveness of material narratives, material marginalia, material anecdotes and museum psychometry (described in Chapter Four) is profoundly affected by the disposition the viewer brings to the museum. Whether the viewer is resistant or receptive to the museum's rhetoric can alter the kind of relationship the viewer has with the biographical object, museum and its subject. Even their relic-ness may be dependent on this. Relic-like objects keep their viewer at a distance however close they may be. Whilst in their home context they encourage a sense of proximity; sometimes auratic and sometimes trace; sometimes relic-like, sometimes not: neither the object or the viewer's disposition towards it are fixed. This concluding chapter examines these shifting positions.

The museum becomes the site where the viewer is engaged with both public narratives created by the display and personal narratives associated with the subject of the museum. The degree to which a viewer is engaged with this subject will depend on the association they have in their personal narrative; where the connection is greatest the receptivity will be increased. The influence of personal narratives upon the reading of museums has been discussed in relation to visitor performativity within heritage sites (Agnew, 2007; Bagnall, 2003; Garoian, 2001). In such sites, especially those that recreate the industrial past, visitors engage with the displays as a form of reminiscence, drawing on their own life histories combined with the cultural histories of the museum (Bagnall, 2003, p. 87). The

type of site could prompt reminiscences about the visitor's own experience or those of their relatives. Visitors to these heritage sites are not "passive" in their engagement with the cultural narratives but "skilful and reflexive performers" (Bagnall, 2003, p. 95).

In the case of the biographical museum and its objects, this is governed by the relationship the viewer has with the subject and/or their work. As such, it is tangled up with personal memories, knowledge of the subject, experiences of the work and the imaginative worlds found there. The extent of the viewer's knowledge of the subject and their work, and more particularly their attachment to same, will encourage the kind of readings and engagement described in previous chapters. The chapter will examine how viewers' expectations and personal attachments, based on their association with or knowledge of the subject, can affect what they are looking for in the biographical object. It will consider this in terms of an imaginative empathetic attachment to the subject and their work and a performative relation to the museum encouraged by immersive displays. Finally, it will show how a particular relation to cultural products and their creators and a particular way of reading displayed objects, which could be considered as an anachronistic disposition to objects and places, can actually be viewed as a product of modernity.

In order to assist in understanding particular dispositions to these objects/museums, I will draw upon examples taken from books on literary tourism and broadcast media. As outlined in the Introduction, I have not chosen to canvas visitor reaction, but instead to use these examples as indicators of a wider cultural response. There are examples of emotion, astonishment and delight prompted by the objects and displays. An example of an emotional response in a biographical museum comes from a documentary about the Freud Museum, where a young woman is filmed becoming overwhelmed in the presence of the analytical couch in Freud's study and beginning to cry (*Behind the Scenes at the Freud Museum*, 2010). A less extreme example of emotion comes from the example used in Chapter Two of the academic who was profoundly moved by seeing a coffee cup ring on a Dickens manuscript: "oh fantastic...oh that's so moving isn't it...I've never seen anything like that before it's so moving isn't it..." (*The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, 2012). There are also examples of biographical objects and places prompting a frisson in the viewer. In a documentary about the Brontë Parsonage, the three hosts talk about their experience in the museum, describing the way it makes the hairs on the back of their neck stand on end (*Being the Brontës*, 2016). Furthermore, there are examples of visitors sensing the creative process. Clare Balding said, of visiting a hotel on the Isle of Wight where Dickens had written *David Copperfield*, that she had felt as though the room was telling her she must write: being in the space somehow created a compulsion to recreate Dickens' occupation (*Ramblings: Ted Hughes and Sylvia Plath*, 2011).

Additionally, there are examples which show an alternate response that reveals a viewer sceptical of the biographical object and display. In her book *Skeptic's Guide to Writers'*

Houses, referred to in the Introduction and Chapter Two, Anne Trubek expresses this attitude throughout her book on American literary sites (2011). However, such a sceptic can be persuaded. Although he starts his book on his tour of literary houses by sounding unconvinced, Simon Goldhill's view shifts as he visits more sites and by the end of his book he appears to be more engaged with the biographical museum phenomenon (2011).¹ Nicola Watson describes the sceptical view that literary scholars have towards literary tourists,

Only the amateur, only the naïve reader, could suppose that there was anything more, anything left, anything either originary or residual, let alone anything more legitimate or legitimating, to be found on the spot marked X. (Watson, 2006, p. 6)

She claims that the phenomenon causes "palpable embarrassment among professional literary scholars" whilst they quietly indulge in it as a private vice or even a guilty pleasure (Watson, 2006, p. 5).

This selection of examples shows a range of responses to biographical objects and museums: from close engagement prompting emotion through to disengaged scepticism with varying responses in between. Such variability in response is connected to the ambiguities discussed in previous chapters; fact and narrativity: authenticity and simulation: the combination of "something of granite-like solidity" and "something of rainbow-like intangibility" (Woolf, 2008, p. 95). This is something that Watson expresses in the concluding section of her book.

Not content with the airy worlds of fiction, [literary tourism] seeks to found it upon biography, and upon real estate. It tries to reanimate the hours of reading... beyond the bounds of both library and book, welding literary memory into physical, bodily memory, and embodying it variously as relic and souvenir. Its emotional charge comes from the simultaneous policing of and trespassing across the ill-defined borders between the real and the fictive, between past and present, between protocols of sentiment and registers of emotion available to the modern... It involves a willed waking dream that converts the fictive to the real and back again, a potent mix of scepticism and belief... (Watson, 2006, p. 211)

The "mix of scepticism and belief" appears in one form or another in each chapter of this thesis. It is present in Chapter One, where narrative objects proved problematic in factual display rhetoric; in the relic-like quality of biographical objects examined in Chapter Two; in the careful fashioning of the subject's life versus the genius at work considered in Chapter Three; and in the potential manifestation of the subject in the curated home described in the Chapter Four. This chapter will examine this intersection of two apparent opposites.

¹ My own experiences during visits to museums also varied and shifted: disappointment on visiting the Dickens Museum (before its refurbishment), the frisson of recognition when entering the Sherlock Holmes Museum, and the changes that occurred on each visit to Down House, being more affected by the missing person displays after having read Darwin's biography.

Secular Relic and Secular pilgrims: Empathetic Engagement with Objects

From the outset of this thesis the relic and its display has been the main frame of reference in the discussion of the biographical object; and in keeping with this I will begin by returning to the relic, or more specifically in the context of this concluding chapter, the pilgrim. The relic in its reliquary drew pilgrims to the churches in which they were housed and in Chapter One I discussed the display methods that enabled these potentially enigmatic objects to be read. The fragmentary relic, frequently hidden from view, was narrated to the pilgrim through oral, textual and visual exposition techniques. In the interpretation of the relic and most particularly its visual exposition the pilgrim was an adept; being used to the specific allegorical representations and visual narratives presented with the relic; having the required knowledge to read and therefore recognise what they were viewing. Display narrated the relic's stories, and provenance, for the pilgrim to read. If the reliquary and the church are storytellers, then the pilgrim is the willing listener, the receiver of deciphered narratives.

The pilgrimage involved more than receiving the narrative of the reliquary and being immersed in its context. The journey to visit the relic church was part of the engagement with the relic. The pilgrimage was something that was experienced.

Pilgrimage may, therefore, be viewed as an especially rich site for ideas about immersive modes of spectatorship; here was a journey in which your involvement went beyond the purely pragmatic and where your subjectivity was shaped both by the physical act of travelling and the inner spiritual journey in which you immersed yourself in the attending rituals of being a pilgrim. (Griffiths, 2008, p. 20)

The ritual journeys could mimic the journey that the relic had been subjected to or a journey the holy figure had made. The pilgrim would not be looking on, but would be engaged in a re-enactment. Walking in the footsteps of the subject was an immersive experience. Once arrived at the holy site the pilgrim would experience another form of immersion. The pilgrim entering the medieval cathedral would be immersed in a cacophony of imagery whose purpose was to encourage or enhance their experience of the divine, to instil wonder. The cathedral was "a 'choreographed environment' that was designed to heighten viewers' experiences of symbolic artefacts" (Garoian, 2001, p. 246). Cynthia Hahn uses the example of the reliquary head of St Eustace originally placed in Basel cathedral, which she describes as having a golden surface that would have shone with brilliance, giving an impression of the human figure giving off light, "a stunning and oversaturated sensory experience" (Hahn, 2011, p. 170), a source of spiritual inspiration. She says of body-part relics that

Their production as objects with the potential to have an arresting and decisive impact upon the senses and thereby to open a pathway of access to the soul...The training of the body and the senses, the acquisition of sensory knowledge or 'aesthetics', is one of the primary motives of education in the High Middle Ages. (Hahn, 2011, p. 164)

The role of the display was to teach the viewer to use what Hahn calls the “gaze of the inner eye” (Hahn, 2011, p. 170). Rather than using physical sight which might only give a superficial appreciation of the imagery, if viewers gazed with their “inner eye” (the imagination) then through their contemplation they could experience the “divine light” emanating from the Saint’s image. Cathedrals were designed to evoke such religious and inspirational experience. This was connected to the medieval belief in the world being a repository of hidden meanings and resemblances between things (as discussed in Chapter One). The inner eye would allow not only a relationship with God but with the interconnected webs of meaning and resemblance.

The pilgrim’s immersion is, like consecration, a two-way process. The relic’s holiness is taken on by its location, and the location adds to and assures the relic’s sanctity. The individual is immersed in the reliquary church, but at the same time absorbs something of what they see, into themselves. In this way, there is a sense that the narratives that surround and create the relic are able to be not just read but experienced by the pilgrim, not just intellectually but bodily. More than that, the viewer knew they would gain insight, have a religious experience of some kind. The experience of the pilgrim was formed by expectation. “When viewing religious spectacle, one expects a corporeal and possibly immersive engagement that could be ... intense...” (Griffiths, 2008, p. 29); and also by recognition, because only in the moment of decipherment can the pilgrim connect with the divine.

As has been discussed, late eighteenth and nineteenth-century Romantic literary tourism has similarities with certain aspects of relic practice. This thesis has also shown how literary tourism provides a foundation for later biographical object and museum practice. The term pilgrimage is frequently used as a term for such literary tourism, and later in tourism to other associative sites. Romantic pilgrimages particularly resemble the religious ones in the case of the Romantic poets, who inspired tourists to walk in their footsteps as well as visit their homes. This pilgrim behaviour is apparent in modern re-enactment behaviours in the museum; another form of museum performativity, considered in Chapter Four. It has been argued that certain museum practices encourage pilgrim-like behaviour in their viewers. In his essay “Performing the Museum”, Charles Garoian states that the museum also uses “environmental conditions” to “evoke bodily responses in viewers” by choreographing the viewers “reverential movements through the museum” (Garoian, 2001, p. 247).

The maintenance of low-level lighting to protect the artefacts from harmful illumination subdues the body to a meditative state. The standard height for mounting artefacts submits the gaze and stance of the viewers’ bodies to servile normative positions. (Garoian, 2001, p. 247)

Garoian uses these quasi-ritual movements to discuss the ways that a viewer/pilgrim is prompted to perform in the museum. This argument has also been made by Alison Griffiths

who compares immersive modes of spectatorship in the museum, and the way the reverential gaze is directed in cathedrals (Griffiths, 2008). These pilgrim-like behaviours are present in the biographical museum but, in this context, the pilgrimage analogy is augmented by its Romantic antecedents. Literary tourism and the biographical museums reverence for the genius is a form of the reverential gaze. The Romantic idealisation of the act of creation and the genius finds its home in the reconstructed study (the most common reconstructed room in the modern biographical museum). In addition, the Romantic pilgrim is ideally suited to appreciate the acts of authentication encouraged by the historical sensibility, which Chapter Two compared to the consecration of the relic.

Several of the examples I presented at the beginning of this chapter, responses to the Dickens manuscript and the Brontë Parsonage, could be described as literary or Romantic pilgrims; both because they are literary subjects and because the literary type has been the founding influence on, and provides the dominant form of, the biographical museum. The responses to Dickens and the Brontë sisters whether being moved by a cup ring, the feeling of being compelled to write, or the hairs on the back of the neck being raised by the sense of the author's presence, can all be traced to particular characteristics of the Romantic pilgrim. In order to further understand both the Romantic pilgrim and the modern emotive response to biographical objects and museums it is first necessary to examine a similar response to the creative works, which were the reason for the subject's subsequent memorial.

The particular relationship the reader/viewer/listener has to the subject's work will necessarily inform the response they have to the objects encountered in the museums dedicated to them. The Romantic pilgrim's relationship with both the creation and the creator is clear in the cult of genius, examined in Chapter Two. This can be understood in terms of the aesthetic experience. In *The Invisible Masterpiece*, Hans Belting has made the case that the reverential emotional response is part of an aesthetic experience and argues for a connection between religious contemplation and forms of aesthetic contemplation (Belting, 2001). The connection between the aesthetic and the religious was also made by Walter Benjamin when he examined the shift in art objects from the church into the museum as part of his consideration of the aura in "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" (2002). He did this through the example of a statue of Venus, outlined in the Introduction to this thesis. The "cult value" of the ritualised statue was translated into "exhibition value" in the gallery (Benjamin, 2002, p. 106). The aura of the object remained because the religious cult was secularised into the cult of beauty; in effect, once the art object moved out of the church and into the gallery (public or private) the revered contemplative gaze remained. This means that the relationship the viewer has with the work bears comparison with the religious experience of the pilgrim at the shrine.

Belting examines the Raphael painting “The Sistine Madonna” (Belting, 2001). This painting became tied up with not only the transformation of the artist Raphael into what he calls “Romanticism’s artistic saint”, but also with an eighteenth-century legend that tells of its creation after Raphael received a celestial vision (Belting, 2001, p. 55). The painting was thought by German Romantics to have been both created and inspired by devotion. The work of art was not just made but “received” as if by divine influence (Belting, 2001, p. 28). As such, the painting was not only of a devotional subject but inscribed with the creation and inspiration of the artist. This was a period, as has been described, where the process of creation and the creator became increasingly important to the viewer/reader. Once the object of creation was inscribed with the act of creation and inspiration, then, like the relic, its particularity and significance might be transferred to the viewer (see Chapter Two’s examination of authenticity, “structures of transference” and consecration).

To view the object not only became an act of aesthetic devotion, but was connected to an expectation of receiving something of the work, and therefore something of the creator of the work, “The inner vision that the artist had experienced was carried over into his picture, and from there the beholder received it in turn if he truly absorbed the work into his soul” (Belting, 2001, p. 56). This inner vision and absorption into the soul echo the pilgrim’s use of the inner eye and spiritual inspiration. The great artist had received his inspiration, as if from the air, and the viewer could receive it in turn through absorbing the work into their soul, contemplating it. Contemplation of the object becomes a means of receiving the inspiration that the artist had received. Expectation and receptivity are intimately connected to the experience of the work of the subject and later their associated objects.

What Belting describes as “absorb[ing] the work into his soul”, is similar to what Benjamin describes as “contemplative immersion” (Belting, 2001, p. 56; Benjamin, 2002, p. 119). By standing before the work of art and contemplating it, the viewer can be enveloped by the work’s aura, becoming immersed in it; “a person who concentrates before a work of art is absorbed by it; he enters into the work, just as according to legend, a Chinese painter entered into his completed painting while beholding it (Benjamin, 2002, p. 119).² In this way the viewer can absorb not only the work but the act of creation; turning the work of art into an event which takes place in their own mind, meaning that they can experience it. This provides an explanation for the way the aesthetic experience persists in the memory of the art lover, remaining haunted by the encounter. Further, it explains the example of a number of visitors to the Dresden museum who remained for prolonged periods in front of the image of the Madonna and then burst into tears (Belting, 2001, p. 58).

² Benjamin sets this as the antithesis of the distracted masses who absorbed the work into themselves (Benjamin, 2002, p. 119).

Such contemplative immersion is more obvious in the appreciation of music. The aesthetics of Romantic music was dominated by the idea of “absolute music” which should be received by a contemplative listener, rather than occasional music which was an accompaniment to an occasion (Jay, 2006, p. 135; Winter, 1998, p. 314).

In the concert hall, noisy sociability with a musical performance merely providing an accompaniment, was at this time being replaced by the silent devotion of listeners who were oblivious of the world despite being in a public place, individuals hearing the same music but receiving it as their own experience. (Belting, 2001, p. 61)

Like the art lover, the music lover was engaged in isolated contemplation of the created work. “Absolute music” was aimed at the “enraptured, solitary listener who gave themselves wholly to the musical experience” (Belting, 2001, p. 55). Silent devotion was brought about by a contemplative reception of the artist’s or composer’s inspiration.

Having considered the aesthetic experience created by viewing and listening to the subject’s work it is necessary to briefly consider how contemplative immersion and silent devotion operates in relation to reading the biographical subject’s work. The reader of the Brontës or Dickens would probably have appeared to others to be in an immersed state, but could they be described as contemplative or as engaging in silent devotion? That is probably a stretch in the analogy unless the reader was engaged with devotional texts. However, reading can provide a form of immersed contemplation, through the act of silent reading. Silent reading, as opposed to reading out loud, had become a cultural norm by the nineteenth century due to increased literacy and wider access to the printed word (Chartier, 1989, pp. 124-127). Silent reading facilitates immersive contemplation because it makes reading an individual and internal experience: “Silent reading... made possible the immediate internalisation of what the reader read...[being] more immediate in its impact on the inner self” (Chartier, 1989, p. 125). This immediate internalisation created a more direct connection with not only the work but also the author.³ It imitates silent thought and gives the illusion of access to the author’s thoughts (Langan, 2008, p. 241). This means that it allows for a sense of proximity with the author’s creation. Silent reading allows for a sense of immersive contemplation like that experienced by the listener and the viewer, because of this internalised and unmediated connection. With the development of the novel, the potential for contemplative immersion increases. When the book being read is a work of fiction or poetry then the content of the book increases this internalised connection and immersion. The fictional worlds that appear in the novel are translated into the mind of the reader, allowing them to become immersed in the fictional narrative. The engagement with such fictional worlds will be discussed further later in this chapter.

³ Silent reading and its lack of mediation has been examined in media theory – Kittler, F. (1986). *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. 1999 ed. Stanford: Stanford University Press. Lacey, K. (2013). *Listening Publics: The Politics and Experience of Listening in the Media Age*. Malden: Polity Press

If the reader is able to give themselves over to a form of contemplative immersion like the viewer of the artwork or the silent listener, then they are able to engage with and receive something from the work. To have an immersive engagement with a book and the world it portrays (and later its author), the reader may be experiencing the work, as the viewer or listener would. It is, therefore, comparable with the silent appreciation of music the listener and the contemplative viewer. The created work is appreciated in such a way that it provides an experience.

This form of engagement with a work of art, music or literature, where the Romantic pilgrim experiences the creative works, and therefore the creativity of their creators, could be said to be empathetic because it encourages identification. Empathy is the concept that founded aesthetics (Imorde, 2014; Koss, 2003), and is referred to in some work about museum performativity (Agnew, 2007; During, 2007). “[Empathy] has come to denote the power of projecting one’s personality into the object of contemplation” (Garber, 2004, p. 24). As part of the contemplation of the art object, the viewer empathises with the creative personality, enabling the sense of sharing the act of creation. Aesthetic empathy allowed the act of contemplating a work of art to be a meeting between the inner life of the artist and the inner life of the viewer. The philosopher Johannes Volkelt, who coined the word *Einfühlung* in 1873, wanted to “step before the soul of the great man” (Imorde, 2014, p. 382). The empathetic viewer must reach within themselves in order to invest the work with feeling and passion, vicariously received from the creator.

The more clearly and passionately the character and interior life of a person are expressed in his exterior, the easier it is for us to empathise, the stronger our sense of intimacy with that individual, and the more easily things are intensified to a personality-based experience (Imorde, 2014, p. 382)

Adoration of the figure of genius relies on this empathetic imagination. A viewer, listener, or reader may put themselves into the creator’s place through empathetic association. Their imaginative inner life would become tied up with the work’s creative expression. Their emotional engagement becomes an act of empathetically projecting themselves into the work being contemplated.

Aesthetic appreciation is a form of empathetic engagement, whether viewing, listening or reading the subject’s works. It can be argued that historical appreciation is also a form of empathetic engagement. Such arguments have been made regarding heritage sites. Simon During examines the eighteenth-century origins of modern re-enactment and Vanessa Agnew the recent affective turn in history. Both writers describe an empathetic relation to history, which lays the foundation for various forms of re-enactment. Both refer to similar ideas about viewer identification with the past. The idea is that empathetic identification with the past made it more understandable. Heritage visitors reach within themselves, using their own memories and associations, to put themselves in their

ancestor's shoes. This way of looking at the past can be described as Romantic as it seems comparable to the historical sensibility which looked for the past in the present.

So far in this chapter, I have been examining the nineteenth-century Romantic pilgrim, and its spiritual forebear, the pilgrim. More specifically, I have considered the Romantic pilgrim's engagement with the creative work of artists, composer/musicians and authors. I will now discuss how that form of engagement is reflected in the objects associated with the created work. The biographical museum is premised on Romantic ideas about the creative genius, and evidence of the subject's creative labours is inscribed on their possessions (especially those associated with the work). If, as Belting stated, the "inner vision [or inspiration] that the artist had experienced was carried over" into their work, then it could also be transferred into the objects that were used in the creation of that work (Belting, 2001, p. 56). Chapter Two argued that the objects of creation could certainly be read as such. If that were the case then the viewer could receive the inspiration of the biographical subject, if the object were "truly" absorbed into their soul, especially if the viewer were also immersed in a place of inspiration.

If the pilgrim remains a presence in the twentieth-century-founded biographical museum, then the pilgrim should be examined further in this context. Thinking back to the responses to objects and places associated with Freud, the Brontës and Dickens (described at the beginning of the chapter), some of these dispositions towards the biographical object and museum may be explained as aesthetic responses similar to those had to the works themselves, for example contemplation, immersion, reverence and empathy. Certainly, it would be simple to compare the art lover bursting into tears before the Raphael Madonna with the visitor to the Freud Museum crying at the sight of the psychoanalytical couch. This may not represent a divine experience of connection with the inspiration of the artist, but certainly an empathetic engagement, a powerful identification with their own experience. The Freud Museum visitor tells the interviewer that Freud has been important in her life, helping her to understand herself (*Behind the Scenes at the Freud Museum*, 2010).

This kind of connection does not necessarily result in such an emotional response, but can allow for a sense of sharing inspiration with the subject; that in some way their creativity might rub off on the viewer. The "inner vision" of the artist, shared by the beholder, shares something with the architect who included old brickwork in his new house (Baudrillard, 2005, p. 82): what Bann called "structures of transference" (Bann, 1984, p. 102). To walk where the biographical subject has walked is, for some, an engagement with the "inner vision" of the subject. In another of the examples given in the introduction, Balding says she feels compelled to write by the act of sitting before the window that Dickens had sat in front of when writing *David Copperfield*. It is a re-enactment of sorts, but more tellingly it

confirms the popular assumption that not only does creative genius linger, but that it can be transferred.

In some biographical museums, contemplation and the reception of inspiration is encouraged as part of the museum experience. In the Elgar Birthplace and Visitor's Centre, as well as in the surrounding landscape, the visitor is encouraged to commune with the inspiring surroundings. In Chapter Three, I described how Elgar assisted in the creation of his own memorial and construction of its association. In this communing with the inspiration he continues this prompting. In an interview published in *The Strand Magazine* of 1904, and quoted in both biographies and the museums guidebook, Elgar is asked about how he creates his works.

...inventing ...comes anywhere and everywhere. It may be when I am walking, golfing, or cycling or the ideas may come in the evening, and then I sit up until any hour in order to get them down. (De Cordova, 1904, p. L1714)

The impression given is that snatches of music could be created from the air around him. Indeed, in a conversation in 1896 Elgar said, "My idea is that there is music in the air, music all around us, the world is full of it and you simply take as much as you require" (Buckley, 1905, p. 32). Here invention/inspiration is both an internal and an immersive experience. He not only outlines his sources of inspiration but gives validity to later visitors attempts to be associate with his inspiration. By the early twentieth century, the Romantic pilgrim's empathetic engagement with places of creative inspiration was an established way of viewing associative sites. These interviews with Elgar would seem to signal another of his attempts to locate himself within the pantheon of great composers.

In the biographical object, the viewer can allow themselves to be imaginatively immersed in the object as a means of associating with the subject's work. However, in the biographical place, the visitor can be physically immersed if not in the inner vision, then the place which inspired it. Physical immersion in the biographical museum allows contemplation to more closely resemble the pilgrim's immersion in the church, discussed earlier. Although the viewer cannot enter the work of art as the Chinese painter was said to have done, they can enter the associative place; be surrounded by those highly narrative-laden places and objects, and influenced by the networks of associations they arrived with. That is, if the museum enables such an immersive and affecting experience. The missing person display used in museums such as Down House, Bateman's (Kipling), the Bronte Parsonage, and Hilltop (Beatrix Potter) offers the immersive absorbing experience because it allows the imaginative simulations described in Chapter Four. Associative objects are combined with associative sites in narrative displays that the viewer can read.

Even in those museums which are not attempting to curate immersion, there are attempts to encourage its sensations. Within the Elgar Birthplace, the visitor is physically

immersed in a former home, but not necessarily affectively immersed in similar ways to listening to music or aesthetic contemplation, most particularly because it lacks reconstruction. However, this museum compensates for this through its use of the audio guide and its musical subject matter. The music allows the Birthplace to become more immersive if the visitor is affected by Elgar's work. The use of an audio guide, especially in the museum of a composer encourages an immersive contemplative experience because it echoes that of his concerts. In the Elgar Birthplace, the audio guide uses his music at strategic points through both the exhibition centre and the birthplace. This combination may allow just such an immersive experience of the object despite its display. The guides also have the effect of detaching the listener from their companions and creating an isolated experience of the objects in the museum. It also effectively silences them and gives the museum a quiet contemplative atmosphere which encourages a processional pace around the space. If this house and its surrounding landscapes were the inspiration that Elgar claimed them to be, then this musical guide around the Birthplace has the effect of allowing the visitor to mimic Elgar's practices, with the tunes that he was inspired to write ringing in their ears as they might have his.

Up until this point in the chapter, the biographical museum visitor has been shown as a descendant of the earlier pilgrim and Romantic pilgrim. However, it has overlooked the thread of scepticism which has run throughout this discussion. For every viewer moved by a coffee cup ring, there are others who are not drawn into the subject's life or the narrative rhetoric's charms. In Chapter One, I considered the way that this type of museum has persisted despite what Weber described as "the disenchantment of society". This pessimistic perspective is also present in Walter Benjamin, whose concept of aura has been so useful in describing the biographical object, but whose writing is frequently concerned with its destruction. Even the use of the home as a representation of the subject's life has the effect of drawing the biographical object away from the auratic and quasi-relic: at the beginning of the twentieth century, the viewer/listener/reader wanted access to the subject, but they wanted to do this by looking behind the curtain and viewing the subject's personal life.

I don't wish to pursue the sceptic's perspective too far, as being sceptics they are unlikely to even visit any of the sites being examined. However, it is necessary to consider that position in order to understand both the shifts in response and the guilty pleasure response. The sceptical response can be understood in terms of the mode of thinking described in Chapter Three, which saw no benefit in an examination of a life in the interpretation of the works. Indeed, even Virginia Woolf, who proved so useful in considering the biographical nature of the house museum expressed scepticism about the

usefulness of visiting “Great Men’s Houses”, in her 1904 article about her visit to the Brontë Parsonage.

I do not know whether pilgrimages to the shrines of famous men ought not to be condemned as sentimental journeys. It is better to read Carlyle in your own study chair than to visit the sound-proof room and pore over the manuscripts at Chelsea. I should be inclined to set up an examination on Frederick the Great⁴ in place of an entrance fee; only, in that case, the house would soon have to be shut up. The curiosity is only legitimate when the house of a great writer or the country in which it is set adds something to our understanding of his books. This justification you have for a pilgrimage to the home and country of Charlotte Brontë and her sisters. (Woolf, 1904)

Her response to the phenomena summarises the sceptic’s attitude. The excessive narrativity of the biographical object and its display seems irrelevant to the works themselves, so why should the sceptic be drawn to such objects and places? A period room may be of academic interest, but any specificity would appear purely speculative if not essentially fictional. This also means that the responses of the Romantic pilgrim would seem eccentric or over-imaginative at best.

This aversion to an over-imaginative viewer response was also apparent in the museums described in Chapter One. Nineteenth-century public museum curators preferred their visitors to study the material information supplied rather than engage with the narratives that might accompany the objects. The factual display rhetoric did not encourage individual experience which could affect the correct reading of the objects (Conn, 1998, p. 21). Not specifically a sceptical response, but such a response to the biographical object comes from the similar perspective of fact over narrativity. However, as has been shown, the more narrative displays (dioramas and period rooms) encouraged such imaginative responses. Indeed, as described in Chapter Four, the use of the “missing person display” as described by Sandberg, encourages empathetic viewing, turning visitors into the Goldilocks of his analogy (2003).

Scepticism about this form of aesthetic engagement was still viewed as a problem in the twentieth century by the Modernists (around the same time as the interwar spike in the foundation of biographical museum). Examining the early twentieth-century Modernist view of empathy (through Bauhaus theatre), Juliet Koss states that,

[Empathy] was soon recoded as passive, describing an uncreative process of identification to which weak-willed audiences easily and happily succumbed.....[It] represented a traditional passive model of bourgeoisie spectatorship. (Koss, 2003, p. 735)

What was required from the audience was “estrangement” which allowed for a “critical awareness of its distance from the work of art” (Koss, 2003, p. 735). Critical awareness implies emotional distance and not the engagement which has been described in this chapter so far. In addition, empathetic engagement was more complex than the passivity

⁴ A biography written by Thomas Carlyle

of response that the Modernists saw. As described in the introduction to this chapter, the engagement encouraged in the biographical museum is not passive, indeed, performative behaviours in the museum show how the visitor's agency allows them to be active contributors to museum narratives. The empathetic or imaginative response could seem to be the opposite of the sceptical response, just as the narrative and the factual rhetoric appear incompatible. However, as shall become clear, the differences between these responses are not so clearly defined.

This scepticism toward the imaginative experience of the Romantic pilgrim lies in a more general distrust of the idea of experience as a subjective response. As referred to in the Introduction to this thesis, "...only the subject really knows what he or she has experienced" (Jay, 2006, p. 6). Individual experience was "distrusted for undermining the certain truth of deductive reason, or attacked as unreliably subjective and incommunicable..." (Jay, 2006, p. 131). Some, like the literary scholars described by Watson (in this chapter's introduction), would be sceptical of the Romantic pilgrim's experience since it was so personal, possibly naïve because it was probably culturally conditioned,

Experience ...is at the nodal point of the intersection between public language and private subjectivity, between expressible commonalities and the ineffability of the individual interior. Although something that has to be undergone or suffered rather than acquired vicariously, even the most seemingly 'authentic' or 'genuine' may be already inflected by prior cultural modes. (Jay, 2006, p. 6)

The place of experience lies in-between apparently expressible certainties and the uncertainties of the personal. The in-between, the place of intersection between apparent opposites have appeared in various points in this thesis: between narrative and fiction, authenticity and simulation, public and private, present and absent. The biographical object, its display and, as will become clear, its viewer can be understood in terms of these blurred border zones; this will explain how the viewer of these objects can shift between scepticism to empathetic engagement.

The Shifting View: Transitional Space between Secular Relic and the Viewer

The sense of academic guilty pleasure described by Watson (2006), and Simon Goldhill's (2011) gradual shift from scepticism to engagement, are perhaps the more interesting of the responses described in the introduction to this chapter. The first of those has its foundation in the sceptical view. To see the literary tourist as an amateur or naïve reader is based on the idea that the "professional literary scholar" knows better than to engage with objects and places as though, as she puts it, "there was anything ... either ordinary or residual...to be found on the spot marked X. (Watson, 2006, p. 6). However, they still engage with it, albeit guiltily. The position of scepticism, or estrangement, then, is

not fixed. Even Virginia Woolf was subject to shifts in response. In a 1931 article for *Good Housekeeping*, she made visits to both Carlyle's and Keats' homes, and in her writing she portrays these former homes by evocatively peopling the rooms, even describing "the relics of the drawing room and study" (Woolf, 1931, p. 41).

The Dickens' coffee ring example goes some way to show how even the scholar will become drawn into this idea of residual presence. It also shows how Goldhill's sceptical view of writer's houses, at the beginning of his tour of Britain, may have shifted towards engagement by its end (Goldhill, 2011). The Dickens scholar, Professor Jenny Hartley, moved by the sight of a coffee ring upon his final manuscript is an emotional response and could be said to come from an empathetic place, although less extreme than weeping visitor to the Freud Museum. However, this identification is different, and in this difference lies the subtle shift in impulse between the appreciation of the work and the associative object. The identification comes from Hartley's knowledge of both the man, the work, and the circumstances of its creation; in addition to her attachment to the stories themselves. Her response is prompted by her awareness of Dickens' circumstances during the writing of the novel, and by its very incompleteness caused by his illness and death. The coffee ring on a written manuscript moves its viewer through identification with illness and loss; without which such an object would be just another manuscript with a dirty mark on it.

It is the knowledge and associations with which the viewer approaches the object which leads to an emotional response. Knowledge could lead to scepticism of the displayed associative object, however, it can also lead to expectations. Just as the pilgrim approached the pilgrim church with expectations that they would have a "corporeal and possibly immersive engagement that could be ... intense" (Griffiths, 2008, p. 29); and the Romantic pilgrim approaches with an expectation of contemplative immersion and empathetic engagement; so the biographical object viewer approaches with an expectation based on knowledge of the subject's life and work. The shift in response evident in Simon Goldhill's book is, if my experience is anything to go by, connected to this change in expectation and in knowledge. As he visited more sites for his modern 'homes and haunts' book, he gained an understanding of the phenomena which in turn encouraged his engagement. In my case, the knowledge gained in reading further on the subjects of the museums studied lead to expectations, which in turn encouraged engagement.

For as knowledge leads to expectation, so this, in turn, enables the moment of recognition. This moment of recognition is evident in the scholar's spontaneous response: "oh fantastic...oh that's so moving isn't it...I've never seen anything like that before it's so moving isn't it..." (*The Mystery of the Mystery of Edwin Drood*, 2012). This recognition can lead to, what could loosely be described as, a eureka moment, a moment of comprehension when all the associations are connected up; a network of interconnections between the viewer, the works, the subject, the object, the place, slot into place. In this point of

connectivity, lies an analogous relation to the eureka moment of the creative subject, or the receiving of the artist's inner vision. The viewer becomes drawn into the narrative of the object, engaging with it in such a way that they become part of that narrative; like the storyteller who "takes what he tells from experience...and in turn makes it the experience of those who are listening to his tale" (Benjamin, 1999e, p. 87).⁵ The viewer moves from being a listener to a participant.

This process of being drawn into the story marks the shift from scepticism (disengagement) to engagement in the biographical object; this despite any artifice in the display or myth making in the narrative. It is as though in their engagement with biographical objects and display, viewers are able to step into the role of the Romantic pilgrim without becoming too immersed. The naïve over-imaginative viewer is almost certainly a creation of the sceptical view. However, to paraphrase Watson, the viewer of the biographical object draws towards and withdraws from the nebulous border between the past and the present, the fictive and the real, and between scepticism and belief (Watson, 2006, p. 211).

One way of understanding the shifts in viewer's engagement is to examine this border zone or intersection. Indeed, this same intersection helps to explain how the fictional and the factual occur simultaneously in relation to the biographical object and the biographical museum, and may explain their existence in modernity. Considered like this, through several specifically late twentieth-century ways of interpreting culture, the shift that can occur between scepticism and empathetic engagement and between distance and proximity can be better understood.

One framework for understanding this comes from psychoanalysis. This space in-between has been described as potential or transitional space by psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott. This idea began with his work on the child and its relationship to the mother, as well as to objects like comfort blankets, which he described as transitional objects, and take the mother's place at moments of absence (Winnicott, 2005). He described a transitional space as being between the psyche (internal reality) and external reality, and in that space lies the object: he described this as the "not-me", to the child's sense of "me". Transitional objects and phenomena are related to an intermediate space between the inner world of the psyche and the external world of objects but belong to neither,

Transitional objects and transitional phenomena belong to the realm of illusion which is at the basis of initiation of experience...This intermediate area of experience,

⁵ In his essay *The Storyteller*, Benjamin uses the figure of the storyteller as an example to show what has been lost with the decline in communicable experience. "[Storytelling] does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information or a report. It sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again. Thus traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel" (Benjamin, 1999e, p. 91). In this way, the storytelling communicates the experience to the listener, and in doing the listener can turn storyteller if the story is integrated into the listener's memory.

unchallenged in respect of its belonging to inner or external reality, constitutes the greater part of the infant's experience, and throughout life is retained in the intense experiencing that belongs to the arts and to religion and to imaginative living, and to creative scientific work. (Winnicott, 2005, p. 19)

Winnicott views cultural experience as a transitional phenomenon. Cultural experience is located "...in the potential space between the individual and the environment" (Winnicott, 2005, p. 135). This potential space is the location of the creative impulse and imagination; "The creation stands between the observer and the artist's creativity" (Winnicott, 2005, p. 93). The potential space is where the inner reality of an individual finds external expression, it is, therefore, the locus of an individual's creativity. This space is also the locus in which the viewer engages with the created object. By engaging with the object the viewer is imaginatively entering that potential space where the creative impulse lies, enabling them to share it. The internal reality is drawn outwards and the external reality is drawn inwards; reality and the imagination meet at the object. The concept of cultural experience as a transitional phenomenon provides another means of understanding the Romantic pilgrim's relation to, not only the work of art, but its creator and the shifts in viewer responses.

Winnicott described people's attachment and response to cultural objects and experience as "little madneses", something which he compares to the transitional phenomena (Winnicott, 1990, p. 107). This term was adopted by the writers of a series of essays on cultural experience — "it is in our socially and culturally sanctioned 'little madneses' that we find respite from the adult's burden of having to maintain a clear boundary between inner and outer worlds, between fantasy and fact" (Kuhn, 2013, p. 3). As part of this collection, Myna Trustram's essay, "Little Madneses of Museums", describes an artist project working with a neglected collection of objects from Manchester Art Gallery (Trustram, 2013). The students involved in her project became fascinated with different parts of the eclectic collection of everyday things, some by making associations with a relative's objects, others feeling like the collector Mary Greg was in the collection or in the room (Trustram, 2013, p. 190).

They become so immersed in it at a very intimate level and in a very personal way and every time we go it's a real journey of discovery...and the time slows down and the pace slows down...your heart rate comes down and everything is focused on this little thing... (Trustram, 2013, p. 191)

In a similar, if less intense, version of the weeping visitor to the Freud Museum, the students have an affective response to the objects; something that Trustram argues is related to both transitional object and place. Trustram views the Mary Greg Collection as just such a transitional space capable of producing these "little madneses" in its visitors.

If, as Trustram argues, the museum can be a transitional space, then this provides an explanation for that sense of threshold space and for the shifting from scepticism into engagement. The biographical museum as a location of transitional objects enables the visitor to inhabit a border space where fantasy and fact, imagination and reality can coexist.

Like the viewers of the Raphael Madonna, the viewer can imaginatively step into the artist's place. This is particularly true in the museum of a creative subject such as an artist, composer or writer, more especially if that museum uses missing person display, which provides "...an evocatively empty space that encourages [the viewer] to perform the imaginative substitution of bodies..." (Sandberg, 2003, p. 2). The influence of Romanticism, the cult of genius and the use of missing person displays means that this is also possible in the museums of subjects whose field lies outside the arts, for example Darwin. The boundary between material reality and inner fantasy becomes blurred, and the more blurred it is the more affective the response; whether that is an overflow of emotion or a frisson of recognition. The visitor walks into and moves across this border zone, from restrained interest to fascinated immersion.

By being a transitional space the museum allows for the play of the imagination, without inviting accusations of naivety that the sceptic may level at the Romantic pilgrim. The viewer can be immersed, engaged with the object or space, but not overwhelmingly submerged by the experience. The emotional viewers of Raphael's Madonna, or the Freud visitor, admittedly do become overwhelmed by the experience, but the biographical museum as a transitional space can more properly be regarded as a space to engage with the authentic and play with the illusory. The visitor is not entirely a pilgrim, but not entirely a sceptic; able to cross between the two at will by engaging with transitional space. It has an audience who are conscious of illusion and therefore not deceived. The nature of transitional space allows the viewer to step into the pilgrim mode, but with one foot in the real world, to play in the transitional space.

Play is an integral part of Winnicott's examination of transitional phenomena and something he connects to cultural experience; it is the source of creativity and self-discovery (Winnicott, 2005, p. 69). Transitional objects and spaces are the locations for play. They allow the player to enter into the imaginative space whilst retaining one foot in reality.

To step into a space and a time to play is to move across a threshold, to leave something behind and to grasp a different reality and rationality defined by its own rules and terms of trade and action (Silverstone, 1999, p. 60)

Its role in threshold crossing has allowed for the idea of play to become associated with and used as a means of analysing media experience (Silverstone, 1999, p. 57). Through play, the viewer is able to overlook the mediation between themselves and what is being meditated. This is another way of describing what was occurring in Chapter Four, where the object and its display acted as the medium through which the visitor could sense the presence of the subject. In the attempt to contact the dead subject and in their imaginative projection into those "evocative concavities" left by the curation, the visitor is imaginatively crossing a threshold (Sandberg, 2003, p. 218).

The concept of play is a means of understanding the sense of crossing the threshold, of contact, of being at home with the subject; moreover, of understanding the shifts that occur in viewer connection and engagement. This two-fold view that play allows, of the real and the fictive, accounts for the viewer towards such displays in the modern world. The viewer can play with the knowledge they have of the subject, acknowledge but overlook the artifice of some of the display. Essentially they play with the museum's narrative rhetoric, without judging the game; nowhere is this more obvious than in the Sherlock Holmes Museum. This is closely connected with the concept of the suspension of disbelief, which is discussed below. Whilst this reconstruction of a fiction space is, in essence, a spectacle, a potentially tacky tourist attraction akin to the contemporary Madame Tussaud's with which it shares a street. It is also an example of the biographical museum game.

The game is apparent both in the books and in the museum. Like the Romantic pilgrim, the Holmes visitor transfers their experience of the books onto the museum. The difference, of course, is that it is not the creator of the work whose objects they are contemplating but a three-dimensional illustration of the creation. By entering into Holmes' world in the imagination, the visitor to 221b Baker Street can enter it in reality (of sorts). It has been argued that the Holmes reader has a very particular relationship with both the character and the fictive world he inhabits, something also apparent in biographical object display (Baring-Gould, 1995; Saler, 2012).

Conan Doyle's detective has been described by many writers as being characteristic of his age. The behaviour of his readers shows the way that readers are able to experience such fictional worlds. Holmes was one of the first fictional characters to be treated as if he was real by his readership (Saler, 2003, p. 600). Virtually from the first publication of a story the public began to write to Holmes at Baker Street with their problems, something that continues today. There are swathes of learned writings on his life and techniques, including many biographies, which treat him as real. This was something that Conan Doyle and his heirs found difficult to deal with. However, this adoration of a fictional character and willingness to take him as real was more complex than simple naivety. Saler defines two types of Holmes enthusiast apparent in the early twentieth century: the naïve and the ironic believer. The naïve believer would seem entirely credulous, but was probably rare even at the time the books were being published, and extinct in the contemporary world. The second type, the ironic believer, pretended Holmes was real. These were the types that wrote the "quasi-scholarly investigations" into Holmes' life: applying his methods to his life and the techniques of the 'fact analysing scholar' to this fictional world. This type could temporarily escape the disenchanting world; indulge their sense of wonder whilst accepting modernity (Saler, 2003, p. 618). It is this type that is more applicable to this discussion.

The ironic imagination is closely related to Coleridge's notion of "willing suspension of disbelief", a concept that is also referred to in media theory (Griffiths, 2008, p. 22; Silverstone, 1999, p. 60). Coleridge wrote that in his collaboration with William Wordsworth,

... it was agreed, that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith. (Coleridge, 1817, p. 99)

The idea was that the unreal should be written about in such a way that it could be taken for real, if only briefly; a kind of contract between writer and reader creating "poetic faith". This desire for life-like representation was discussed in Chapter Two in relation to historicism and the past seemingly available in the present: *verité* or the 'utopia of life-like representation' (Bann, 1984, p. 15). The use of maps and illustrations allowed the appearance of the past in the present, and the identification of real visitable places with the events of the past. Once those techniques were established in the early nineteenth century, later generations used the same techniques on fictional worlds (Bann, 1984, p. 54; Saler, 2012, p. 14). The adoption of the rhetoric used by fact-focused writers, footnotes, maps, appendices, pushed the idea of "willing suspension of disbelief" further. "One could actively believe, albeit ironically, in marvels and wonders, without compromising one's standing as a rational and responsible adult" (Saler, 2004, p. 142). The Holmes enthusiast who enters into the world of 221b Baker Street and Holmes' life examines what they find with what Saler calls a "double-minded awareness", enabling the reader to detect alongside him, and leading to quantities of fan fiction (Saler, 2004, p. 139).

The notion of the ironic imagination, associated with a literary form has similarities with the transitional phenomena outlined earlier; sharing the double consciousness of the border between the real and the unreal. In combination, the idea of the ironic imagination can be applied to the biographical museum, but most particularly the Sherlock Holmes Museum. Like the literary tourist, the reader using the ironic imagination moved beyond the text through realistic additions like footnotes, maps and appendices, and situates the fictive in the real. Readers were not naively believing Holmes was real but playing with that idea, using real world methods and techniques within fictional worlds. Likewise, the biographical museum is based on the notion of going beyond the creative work, viewing the life as an insight on the creator, through anecdotal traces and material marginalia.

Not every visitor to any of these museums will become enchanted with its objects or in its display. However, the visitor to a biographical museum is encouraged to play the transitional game. The creative subject like Elgar is a prime contender for this kind of visitor response. The realms of fact and fiction overlap in those that create fictive worlds and the visitor who knows those worlds can enter into complex interrelations of the real world, biographical world, and fictional worlds: transitional spaces.

The visitor to the Baker Street museum cannot get around its fictional basis, but using the ironic imagination the museum becomes a place in which to be at home with Holmes, commune with his genius and interpret the narratives of his life. The visitor can re-enact his activities both actually (by wearing his deerstalker) and imaginatively by examining his home as he would another's. Imaginatively because in looking to recreate his home, based on the stories, the museum curator presents not just a three-dimensional illustration, but the clues with which to deduce his activities. We are encouraged to become the detective. This museum presents the alternative to the shrine of the genius. If the visitor is prepared to play the game in the Baker Street house, the objects are there for deduction. The novels and short stories provide the visitor with a manual of detection. The visitor to the biographical museum can attempt to use all these tools, to re-enact Holmes' methods, and read the traces to infer elements of his life whilst in 221b Baker Street. At a basic level, the objects in that living room are indicative of their lives, as other biographically displayed homes can be. However, the museum sets up those of us who have good knowledge of the stories for a game of deduction. The clues to Holmes' habits are presented and can be confirmed in the books. The slipper containing tobacco, the knife stabbed through his letters and the cigars in the coal-scuttle: all of these clues or references are presented to the viewer. Holmes' monographs on tobacco and footprints are on a shelf on the second floor. On the one hand, these are book references for the reader to recognise, but on the other, they are enough to encourage the visitor to play the detective; if those signs were clearly recognisable then others would surely be there to discover.

By deciphering traces and interpreting daily life the subject of examination is brought closer to us and the genius is made more human. However, it has been argued that Holmes, and therefore perhaps his reenactors transform objects from being insignificant and everyday into "ciphers for the bizarre" (Highmore, 2002, p. 4). While Holmes punctures the mysterious by explaining it rationally his method of divining clues transforms the everyday into mini-mysteries to be unravelled. More than that, it transforms the everyday object into an object full of narrative and meaning. Likewise, in the biographical museum, the viewer, should they choose to, can look for the everyday and transform it through its association with the subject and the narrative of its use. The narrative display in conjunction with the missing person display provides the conditions for both the pilgrim and the detective; the objects are both auratic and full of traces.

The viewer of the biographical object can be a pilgrim, sceptic, or negotiate the shifting path in-between. The biographical museum allows for this because it is a transitional space in which the viewer can play with their associations and with the rhetoric of the museum. This play, in turn, will be influenced by the knowledge and prior engagement that they bring to the biographical object, which will have an effect on the degree to which they play the pilgrim. Alternatively, it can allow them to play the detective, reading the clues (the material

anecdotes) presented in the curation that gives Holmes-like insight into the subject. For both pilgrim and detective, the moment of recognition, prompted when knowledge and expectations are confirmed, draws the viewer towards the object (and therefore the subject), but also enables that sought after moment of understanding. This, being so close to the eureka moment, is analogous to the connection with the subject's inner vision and the sense of connection with the absent subject. As such it can transform even the most reticent visitor into a Romantic pilgrim.

Secular Relic Explained in Modernity

I began this thesis by asking whether Charles Babbage's Brain, Virginia Woolf's cheque, a pillow from Freud's couch, or Charles Dickens's quill could truly be considered as secular relics; and if this were the case, how the display of such objects could be explained in the modern museum. Biographical objects and their display can be said to be both relic-like and a product of modernity. If their relic-ness appears anachronistic this is only because their survival into the twenty-first century looks eccentric. This is because the biographical museum phenomenon was formed at a period where society was seen to have become disenchanted and it escalated during the modernist period.

The relic practice analogy is an appropriate one. In each aspect of the practice there is an equivalent in the biographical object: association, narrative, provenance, consecration, display, communication and pilgrimage. Indeed, there is a way in which these provide contingent factors. Association creates the object's significance and the closer it has been to the subject of interest, the greater its significance. Bodily and contact relics can similarly be found in the biographical display, although, the former, less prevalent, unless in the form of locks of hair. Association is a strong enough creator of significance to transform otherwise everyday objects into media through which to have contact with the absent subject. Association changes an object into THE object which gives it meaning and, the narrative of how the association occurred gives it its definite article. Narrative is a contingent factor in the association of an object with person or event. The statement of association is important but when narratives are added the object becomes augmented by thick description. Narrative and provenance go hand in hand with the former providing the latter and this makes the relic-like object the site for multiple narratives which give it its authenticity. This authentication of the relic object became inseparable from the idea of consecration where the relic would sanctify the church through a process of transferring authenticity. In return the church lent the object legitimacy; it was a two-way process. Likewise, the authentic object exudes its authenticity, giving its surroundings legitimacy.

Object narratives of association, and therefore authenticity, are not visibly obvious and require exposition. This means the object requires mediation between it and its viewer, beyond simple statements of fact. This was something that was a problem for the factual rhetoric employed in nineteenth-century public museums which required its material to educate without such narrative intermediaries. Oral and textual exposition are joined in both the relic church, curiosity cabinet and biographical display by visual exposition providing a means of communicating the object's meaning. The visual exposition of the narrative object is most effective when it assumes a narrative form. The narrative rhetoric in the church was provided by the decoration of the reliquary and the building. Such imagery told the story of the object's association and its history since that contact. With the biographical object, this visual exposition is provided by the use of the period room or missing person display.

This type of display becomes relic-like in several ways. Firstly, it visually narrates the object by putting it back in context; each object in the display narrates its use and in combination these objects narrate each other. Secondly, in the way it makes the past accessible in the present. The period room allows the viewer to gain a sense of the past through the appearance of being frozen at the point the subject left the room. This occurs in combination with the signs or traces of the subject's past that mark the objects surface (which I describe as material marginalia). Thirdly, these displays allow the absent presence to be manifested through their arrangement. The empty chair becomes a vehicle for the viewer to fill in their imagination, whether by projecting themselves into the absence and re-enacting the subject, or by turning into ghosts of the way they imagine the subject to have been.

In this way, visual exposition of the associative object allows for a sense of communication with the subject through their objects. In the relic church, such communication was apparent where the statuary was viewed as transubstantial; the carved figure of the saint was that saint. By thinking of the biographical object as a medium, (both communicative and spiritualist) a sense of communication is possible by what I have called museum psychometry. In the biographical museum the sense of communication is encouraged by museum exposition, whether from the display technique or from the museum interpretation material.

The legacy of Romanticism reinforces this relic analogy and the adulation of the creative genius encourages comparison. It turns the reconstructed home into a sanctified space in which to commune with the creative subject. It is also from the legacy of Romanticism that the pilgrim gets their impulse to look for the inner vision of the creative in their work. The associated perspective, the historical sensibility endows the objects of the past and their look, with significance, and turns their authenticity into a transferable particularity.

However, the relic analogy can be stretched too far. The reconstruction of the home and the visual narration of everyday life does not easily conform to the relic or Romantic idea. The exposure of the subject's daily life with all its vulnerabilities and potentially undermining incidents threaten to bring the genius back to being a mere mortal. The material anecdote, the traces of the everyday allow insight into the person rather than into the creative inner vision. The sense given is that the biographical subject is laid bare for us to examine rather than presented for our revered gaze. The ways in which twentieth-century biography influences the museum encourages such attention to the everyday. The subject is brought closer to us rather than seeming always at a distance.

Yet, this is a sign that the biographical object and museum are not just part of an anachronistic relation to objects, but can be understood as a modern phenomenon. As Virginia Woolf said of biography, "facts must be manipulated; some must be brightened; others shaded..." (Woolf, 1927, p. 95). Likewise, in the museum, the subject's life, whilst it might appear to show the man or woman behind the genius, is carefully constructed to brighten certain aspects of the subject's life and shade others. What the visitor sees is always essentially an artifice which is specifically arranged to convey the narrative the curator wants to reveal about the subject. In some, this is the established view of the subject, in others, it is a view the holders of the subject's legacy wish to convey; and in the case of Elgar it is the view of himself he constructed.

The artifice and the myth that can surround the biographical subject and later their display could be a problem to those sceptics preoccupied with facts. However, it is a sign of the biographical museum's modern origins that this is not a discernible problem if regarded as a liminal space, media, psychoanalysis and literature allow for a border zone between the here and there, the real and the unreal, the narrative and the factual. Media theory, in the guise of haunting provides an explanation for spaces between apparent opposites: absence/presence, life/death, materiality/spirituality (Sword, 2002, p. 55). Likewise, the ironic imagination and transitional phenomena, discussed earlier, also allow for such blurred lines and in-between spaces. Biographical objects, their display and the disposition we have towards them can be seen through the relic analogy, but should be considered as a product of modernity.

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Appendix

Biographical Museum Database key

Data based upon visits, museums guidebooks and websites.

Home - Type of association

Initials refer to Former Home (H), Near Home (NH), Workplace (W), Near Workplace (NW), Birthplace (B), and Near Birthplace (NB)

Unknown - where information not clear from research. N/A - not applicable where the display is within a more general public museum.

Display type

Cabinet/Gallery - Biographical objects held in cabinets, or in a gallery

Missing person or period room - Biographical objects displayed as if in use

In some circumstances the museums are a mix of missing person and cabinet, in which case they appear in both columns

Unknown or N/A - where information is not forthcoming through searches

Founded

The date the museum was open to the public if known. Where not applicable, this is because the display is within a larger museum and the date of that particular display is unclear. All museums were contacted if dates were not clear from searched sources.

Note the two dates for the Brontës - these refer to the first museum, and the when it was moved into the Parsonage.

Surname	Forename	Field	Birth	Death	Museum	Location	HOME	Cabinet/ Gallery	Missing person	Unknown or N/A	Founded
Anning	Mary	Science	1799	1847	Lyme Regis Museum	Lyme Regis	NH	Y			1998
Arkwright	Richard	other	1732	1792	Cromford Mill,	Cromford	W			Y	N/A
Armstrong	1st Lord	other	1810	1900	Cragside,	Morpeth	H			Y	N/A
Austen	Jane	Literary	1775	1817	Jane Austen Museum	Chawton	H		Y		1947
Austen	Jane	Literary	1775	1817	Jane Austen Centre	Bath	NH	Y			1999
Babbage	Charles	Science	1791	1871	Science Museum	London	N/A	Y			unknown
Baden Powell	Lord	other	1857	1941	Baden Powell House	London	N/A	Y			1961
Barrie	J M	Literary	1860	1937	JM Barrie's Birthplace	Kirriemuir	B		Y		1937
Bede	Venerable	Literary	673	735	Bede's world	Jarrow	NH			Y	2003
Bell,	Vanessa	Artist	1879	1961	Charleston,	Lewes	H		Y		1980
Betjeman	John	Literary	1906	1984	Betjeman Centre	Wadebridge	NH	Y			1989
Bewick	Thomas	Art	1753	1828	Cherryburn	Stocksfield	H	Y			1991
Blake	Robert	Military	1599	1657	Blake Museum	Bridgwater	B	Y			1926
Bonaparte	Napoleon	Military	1769	1821	Napoleon Exhibition	Various	X	Y			1815
Boston	Lucy M	Literary	1892	1990	Green Knowe	Huntingdon	F		Y		unknown
Boswell	James	Literary	1740	1795	Auchinleck House	Ayr	H		Y		N/A
Bowes-Lyon	Elizabeth	Royalty	1900	2002	Glamis Castle	Forfar	H		Y		1950
Britten	Benjamin	Music	1913	1976	Red House	Aldeburgh	H		Y		2013
Bronte	Charlotte	Literary	1816	1855	Bronte Parsonage Museum	Haworth	H		Y		1895
Bronte	Emily	Literary	1818	1848	Bronte Parsonage Museum	Haworth	X				1928
Bronte	Anne	Literary	1820	1849	Bronte Parsonage Museum	Haworth	X				N/A
Buchan,	John	Literary	1875	1940	John Buchan Centre,	Tweedstuir	X	Y			1983
Bunyan	John	Literary	1628	1688	Bunyan Museum	Bedford	NH		Y		1998
Burns	Robert	Literary	1759	1796	Writers Museum	Edinburgh	N/A	Y			1961
Burns	Robert	Literary	1759	1796	Burns Cottage	Alloway	H		Y		1881
Burns,	Robbie	Literary	1759	1796	Burns House,	Dumfries	H		Y		1814
Burns,	Robbie	Literary	1759	1796	Burns House Museum,	Mauchline	H	Y			1814
Byron	Lord	Literary	1788	1824	Newstead Abbey	Nottingham	H		Y		1931
Cameron	Julia Margaret	Art	1815	1879	Dimbola Lodge	Freshwater	H	Y			1993
Carlyle	Thomas	Literary	1795	1881	Carlyle's Birthplace	Ecclefechan	B		Y		1883
Carlyle	Thomas	Literary	1795	1881	Carlyle's House	London	H		Y		1895
Carlyle	jane Welsh	Literary	1801	1866	Jane Welsh Carlyle Museum	Haddington	B		Y		1981
Carnegie	Andrew	other	1835	1919	Andrew Carnegie Birthplace museum	Dunfermline	B		Y		1908
Causley	Charles	Literary	1917	2003	Lawrence House	Launceston	H	Y			N/A

Appendix

Surname	Forename	Field	Birth	Death	Museum	Location	HOME	Gallery/ person Cabinet/ Missing N/A	Unknown or N/A	Founded	
Charles I	King	Royalty	1600	1649	Boscobel House	Cosford	NA		Y	1967	
Christie	Agatha	Literary	1890	1976	Agatha Christie Gallery	Torquay	NH	Y		1990	
Christie	Agatha	Literary	1890	1976	Greenaway	Brixham	H		Y	2009	
Churchill	Winston	Politics	1809	1965	Chartwell	Westerham	H		Y	1965	
Churchill	Winston	Politics	1809	1965	Churchill Museum & Cabinet war rooms	London	NW		Y	2005	
Clare	John	Literary	1793	1864	John Clare House Museum	Peterborough	H		Y	2006	
Cleeves	Anne of	Royalty	1515	1557	Anne of Cleeves House	Lewes	H		Y	N/A	
Cobbett	William	Literary	1762	1835	Willmer House (Farnham Museum)	Farnham	NB	Y		N/A	
Coleridge	Samuel T	Literary	1772	1834	Coleridge Cottage	Bridgwater	H		Y	1908	
Constable	John	Art	1776	1837	Flatford: Bridge Cottage	Flatford	NW	Y		1943	
Cook	Captain	Discovery	1728	1779	Captain Cook Schoolroom Museum	Great Ayton	NH		Y	1928	
Cook	Captain	Discovery	1728	1779	Captain Cook Birthplace Museum	Middlesborough	B	Y		1978	
Cook	Captain	Discovery	1728	1779	Captain cook Memorial Museum	Whitby	H		Y	1987	
Cowper	William	Literary	1731	1800	Cowper & Newton Museum	Olney	H	Y		1900	
Crampton,	Th. Russell	Science	1816	1887	Crampton Tower Museum,	Broadstairs	W			Y	N/A
Crompton,	Samuel	Science	1753	1827	Hall i'th'Wood Museum,	Bolton	H		Y	1905	
Cromwell	Oliver	Politics	1599	1658	Cromwell Museum	Huntingdon	NH	Y		1962	
Dahl	Roald	Literary	1916	1990	Roald Dahl Museum & Story Centre	Gr. Missenden	NH	Y		2005	
Darling,	Grace	other	1815	1842	Grace Darling Museum,	Banburgh	NH	Y		1938	
Darwin	Charles	Science	1809	1882	Darwin at Down House	Bromley	H		Y	1929	
Darwin	Erasmus	Science	1731	1802	Erasmus Darwin's House	Lichfield	H	Y		1999	
Dickens	Charles	Literary	1812	1870	Dickens Birthplace Museum	Portsmouth	B		Y	1904	
Dickens	Charles	Literary	1812	1870	Dickens House Museum	London	H		Y	1923	
Dickens	Charles	Literary	1812	1870	Bleak House Museum	Broadstairs	N/A			Y	N/A
Dickens	Charles	Literary	1812	1870	Gads Hill	Higham	H			Y	N/A
Dickens,	Charles	Literary	1812	1870	Dickens House Museum & Library,	Broadstairs	X		Y	1925	
Disraeli	Benjamin	Politics	1804	1881	Hughenden Manor	High Wycombe	H		Y	1947	
Doyle	Arthur Conan	Literary	1859	1930	Portsmouth City Museum	Portsmouth	NH	Y		N/A	
Du Maurier	Daphne	Literary	1907	1989	Du Maurier Literary Centre	Fowey	NH	Y		2000	
Elgar	Edward	Music	1877	1934	Elgar Birthplace Museum	Lower Broadheath	B	Y		1935	
Eliot	George	Literary	1819	1880	Arbury Hall	Nuneaton	NH		Y	N/A	
Eliot	George	Literary	1819	1880	Nuneaton Museum & Gallery	Nuneaton	N/A	Y		N/A	
Faraday	Michael	Science	1791	1867	Royal Institution	London	W	Y	Y	1973	
Fleming	Alexander	Science	1881	1955	Fleming Museum	London	W		Y	1993	
Fox Talbot	William	Science	1800	1877	Lacock Abbey	Chippenham	H		Y	1947	
Franklin	Benjamin	Politics	1706	1790	Benjamin Franklin House	London	H			Y	2006
Freud	Sigmund	Science	1856	1939	Freud Museum	London	H		Y	1982	
Gainsborough	Thomas	Art	1727	1788	Gainsborough's House	Sudbury	B	Y		1961	
Gaskell	Elizabeth	Literary	1810	1865	Gaskell's House	Manchester	H		Y	2014	
Glover	Thomas Blake	other	1838	1911	Glover House	Aberdeen	H			Y	N/A
Goldfinger,	Erno	Architect	1902	1987	2 Willow Road,	London	H		Y	1996	
Handel	Frederick	Music	1685	1759	Handel's House	London	H		Y	2001	
Hardy	Thomas	Literary	1840	1928	Hardy's Cottage	Dorchester	H		Y	1947	
Hardy	Thomas	Literary	1840	1928	Max Gate	Dorchester	H		Y	1994	
Hardy	Thomas	Literary	1840	1928	Dorchester Museum	Dorchester	NH		Y	N/A	
Hardy	Oliver	Theatre	1892	1957	Laurel & Hardy Museum	Ulverston	N/A			Y	N/A
Hepworth	Barbara	Art	1903	1975	Barbara Hepworth Museum	St Ives	H	Y		1976	
Hepworth	Barbara	Art	1903	1975	Hepworth Gallery	Wakefield	NB	Y		2011	
Herriot	James	Literary	1916	1995	World of James Herriot	Thirsk	H		Y	1999	
Herschel	William	Science	1738	1822	William Herschel Museum	Bath	H		Y	1981	
Hogarth	William	Art	1697	1764	Hogarth's House	Chiswick	X		Y	1904	
Holmes	Sherlock	Fiction	1854	1929	Sherlock Holmes Museum	London	H		Y	1990	

Appendix

Surname	Forename	Field	Birth	Death	Museum	Location	HOME	Gallery/Person	Missing	Unknown or N/A	Founded
Holst	Gustav	Music	1874	1934	Holst Museum	Cheltenham	H		Y		1975
James	Henry	Literary	1843	1916	Lamb House	Rye	H		Y		1951
Jefferies,	Richard	Literary	1848	1887	Richard Jefferies Museum,	Swindon	H	Y			1960
Jenner	Edward	Science	1749	1823	Edward Jenner Museum	Berkeley	H		Y		1985
Jenner	Edward	Science	1749	1823	Science Museum	London	N/A	Y			unknown
Jerome	Jerome K	Literary	1859	1927	Jerome K Jerome Birthplace Museum,	Walsall	B			Y	1984
Johnson	Samuel	Literary	1709	1784	Samuel Johnson's Birthplace	Lichfield	B		Y		1901
Johnson	Samuel	Literary	1709	1784	Dr Johnson's House	London	H		Y		1912
Keats	John	Literary	1795	1821	Keat's House	Hampstead	H		Y		1925
Kipling	Rudyard	Literary	1865	1936	Bateman's	Burwash	H		Y		1939
Knox	John	Politics	1505	1572	John Knox House	Edinburgh	H	Y			1850
Laurel	Stan	Theatre	1890	1965	Laurel & Hardy Museum	Ulverston	NB	Y			1983
Lawrence	D H	Literary	1855	1930	DH Lawrence Birthplace Museum	Eastwood	B		Y		1976
Lawrence	T E	Literary	1888	1935	Clouds Hill	Wareham	H		Y		N/A
Leighton	Frederick	Art	1830	1896	Leighton House	Holland Park	H		Y		1900
Lennon	John	Music	1940	1980	Mendips	Liverpool	H		Y		2004
Lister	Joseph	Science	1827	1912	Science Museum	London	N/A	Y			unknown
Livingstone	David	Discovery	1813	1873	David Livingstone Centre	Blantyre	B		Y		1929
Lloyd George	David	Politics	1863	1945	Lloyd George Museum	Llanystumdwy	H	Y			1960
Macintosh	Charles Rennie	Art	1868	1928	Hunterian Museum	Glasgow	NW	Y			N/A
Mackintosh,	Charles Rennie	Art	1868	1928	Mackintosh House,	Glasgow	N/A		Y		1845
McCartney	Paul	Music	1942	/	Forthlin Road	Liverpool	H		Y		1998
Miller	Hugh	Science	1802	1856	Hugh Miller's Cottage	Cromarty	B		Y		1890
Milton	John	Literary	1608	1674	Milton's cottage	Chalfont St Giles	H	Y			1887
Moore,	Henry	Art	1898	1986	Henry Moore Foundation	Much Hadham	W		Y		1977
Morris	William	Art	1834	1896	William Morris Gallery	Walthamstow	NB	Y			1950
Morris	William	Art	1834	1896	Kelmscott House	Upper Mall,	H	Y			1955
Morris	William	Art	1834	1896	Kelmscott Manor	Kelmscott	H		Y		1967
Morris	William	Art	1834	1896	Red House	Bexleyheath	H		Y		2002
Muir	John	Science	1838	1914	John Muir's Birthplace	Dunbar	B	Y			2003
Munnings,	Sir Alfred	Art	1878	1959	Munnings House,	Dedham	H	Y			1962
Murray	John	Literary	1745	1843	John Murray Archive Exhibition	Edinburgh	N/A	Y			N/A
Nelson	Horatio	Military	1758	1805	Nelson Museum & Local History Centre	Monmouth	N/A	Y			1924
Nelson	Horatio	Military	1758	1805	Norfolk Nelson Museum	Great Yarmouth	N/A	Y			2002
Newton	Isaac	Science	1642	1727	Woolsthorpe Manor	Woolsthorpe	H	Y			1943
Nightingale	Florence	Science	1820	1910	Florence Nightingale Museum	London	W	Y			1989
Nuffield (Morris)	Lord William	other	1877	1963	Nuffield House	Henley-On-Thames	H		Y		unknown
Oates	Lawrence	Discovery	1880	1912	Oates Museum (Gilbert White's House)	Selborne	NA	Y			N/A
Owen,	Robert	other	1771	1858	Robert Owen Memorial Museum,	Newtown	NH	Y			1928
Parry,	Joseph	Music	1841	1903	Joseph Parry's Ironworkers Cottage,	Merthyr Tydfil	B		Y		1979
Pope	Alexander	Literary	1688	1744	Twickenham Museum	Twickenham	NH	Y			N/A
Potter	Beatrix	Literary	1866	1943	HillTop	Hawkshead	H		Y		1946
Potter	Beatrix	Literary	1866	1943	Beatrix Potter Gallery	Hawkshead	NW		Y		1988
Pugin	Augustus	Art	1812	1852	The Grange	Ramsgate	H		Y		N/A
Ransome	Arthur	Literary	1884	1967	Museum of Lakeland life	Kendal	N/A		Y		1990
Rhodes,	Cecil	Politics	1853	1902	Rhodes Museum,	Bishop's Stortford	B		Y		1938
Ruskin	John	Art	1819	1900	Ruskin Museum	Coniston	NH	Y			1901
Ruskin	John	Art	1819	1900	Brantwood	Coniston Water	H		Y		1952
Ruskin,	John	Literary	1819	1900	Ruskin Museum,	Sheffield	X	Y			1901
Sambourne,	Linley	Art	1844	1910	Linley Sambourne House.	London	H		Y		1980
Scott	Walter	Literary	1771	1832	Abbotsford	Melrose	H		Y		1833
Scott	Walter	Literary	1771	1832	Writers Museum	Edinburgh	N/A	Y			N/A

Appendix

Surname	Forename	Field	Birth	Death	Museum	Location	HOME	Gallerie/ Cabinet/ Person	Missing or N/A	Unknown or N/A	Founded
Scott,	Sir Walter	Literary	1771	1832	Sir Walter Scott's Courtroom,	Selkirk	W		Y		1907
Shakespeare	William	Literary	1564	1616	Shakespeare's Birthplace	Stratford Upon Avon	B		Y		1847
Shakespeare	William	Literary	1564	1616	Nash's House	Stratford Upon Avon	X		Y		1891
Shakespeare	William	Literary	1564	1616	Anne Hathaway's House	Stratford Upon Avon	H		Y		1892
Shakespeare	William	Literary	1564	1616	Mary Arden's House	Stratford Upon Avon	H		Y		1930
Shakespeare	William	Literary	1564	1616	Halls Croft	Stratford Upon Avon	H		Y		1949
Shaw	Bernard	Literary	1856	1950	Shaw's Corner	Ayot St Lawrence	H		Y		1951
Sitwell	Edith	Literary	1887	1664	Renishaw Hall	Chesterfield	H	Y			2010
Soane,	Sir John	Architect	1753	1837	Sir John. Soane's Museum,	London	H		Y		1833
Spencer	Diana	Royalty	1961	1997	Althorp	Northampton	H	Y			1998
Spencer,	Stanley	Art	1891	1959	Stanley Spencer Gallery,	Cookham Rise	NH	Y			1962
Stephenson	George	Science	1781	1848	George Stephenson Birthplace	Wylam	B		Y		1949
Sterne	Lawrence	Literary	1713	1768	Shandy Hall	Coxwold	H		Y		1973
Stevenson	Robert Louis	Literary	1850	1894	Writers Museum	Edinburgh	NA	Y			N/A
Stevenson	Robert Louis	Literary	1850	1894	Robert Louis Stevenson House	Edinburgh	H			Y	N/A
Tennyson	Alfred	Literary	1809	1892	Farringford	Freshwater	H			Y	N/A
Terry	Ellen	Theatre	1847	1928	Smallhythe Place	Tenterden	H		Y		1929
Thomas	Dylan	Literary	1914	1953	Boat House	Laugharne	H		Y		1980
Thomas	Dylan	Literary	1914	1953	Dylan Thomas Centre	Swansea	NB	Y			1995
Turner	JMW	Art	1775	1851	Turner's House	Twickenham	H			Y	N/A
Victoria	Queen	Royalty	1819	1901	Osborne House	East Cowes	H		Y		1904
Walker	Emery	Art	1851	1933	7 Hammersmith Terrace	Richmond	H		Y		N/A
Walpole	Horace	Literary	1717	1797	Strawberry Hill	Richmond	H	Y			N/A
Walton	Isaak	Literary	1593	1683	Isaak Walton's Cottage	Stafford	H		Y		1924
Watt	James	science	1736	1819	Science Museum	London	W		Y		1924
Watts,	George Frederic	Art	1817	1903	Watts Gallery,	Compton	H	Y			1903
Wellington	Duke of	Politics	1769	1852	Walmer Castle	Walmer	H		Y		1905
Wellington	Duke of	Politics	1769	1852	Apsley House	Piccadilly	H		Y		1947
Wesley	John	Religion	1703	1791	Wesley Chapel & House	London	W	Y			1898
West	Vita Sackville	Literary	1892	1962	Sissinghurst	Nr Tunbridge wells	H		Y		1938
West	Vita Sackville	Literary	1892	1962	Knole	Sevenoaks	H		Y		N/A
white	gilbert	Science	1720	1793	Gilbert White's House & Oates Museum	Selborne	H		Y		1955
Wilberforce	William	Politics	1759	1833	Wilberforce House	Hull	B	Y			1906
Williams	Ralph Vaughan	Music	1872	1958	All Saints Church	Down Ampney	NB	Y			2005
Wilson	Edward	Discovery	1872	1912	Cheltenham Gallery & Museum	Cheltenham	NB	Y			N/A
Wolfe	General James	Military	1727	1759	Quebec House	Westerham	B		Y		1918
Woolf	Virginia	Literary	1882	1941	Monk's House	Lewes	H		Y		1980
Wordsworth	William	Literary	1770	1850	Dove Cottage	Grasmere	H		Y		1891
Wordsworth	William	Literary	1770	1850	Rydal Mount	Ambleside	H		Y		1970
Wordsworth	William	Literary	1770	1850	Wordsworth House	Cockermouth	H		Y		2004

Appendix

