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## American Travel-writing and the invention of 'Story-book England'

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*From Brazil to Macao: Diasporic Travel-Writing*

**‘American travel-writing and the invention of  
“Story-book England”’.**

**Nicola J. Watson (Open University)**

My title is derived from Susan Coolidge’s fiction for adolescent girls, *What Katy Did Next*, published in 1886; chapter 5, entitled ‘Storybook England’, describes a young American girl being taken on an educational tour of England, the itinerary of which is extensively determined by American travel writers of the earlier nineteenth century. The development of that itinerary over the nineteenth century is my subject here – what it was, and what was at stake for the Americans who followed it, whether as actual tourists or merely as readers.

For about a hundred years after the Declaration of Independence from Britain in 1776, post-colonial American culture was preoccupied with defining a national identity, a project freighted with great urgency by the time of the Civil War and the threatened break-up of the young republic. That national identity was at once dependent upon and antagonistic to the country that Nathaniel Hawthorne’s 1863 book of travel essays would call by way of title ‘Our Old Home’. American-authored travel literature between the War of Independence and the Civil War, whether about the frontier to the West or about Europe to the East, was all part of a larger movement of nation-forming tourism (actual and armchair), a beating of the physical and cultural bounds of the new United States. This project came to a particularly complicated and anxious focus when it came to visiting the erstwhile motherland.<sup>1</sup> Hawthorne’s title, for example, conceives England at once as ‘our home’, and yet as ‘our old home’, from which ‘we’ have moved on, a diasporic formulation at once affectionate and disparaging. As I will be arguing below, the construction of a tourist map of Englishness was central to the making of an American cultural identity. (‘Englishness’, as far as early nineteenth-century Americans were concerned, comprised not only England proper, but Scotland and Ireland too, because they all three fell squarely for contemporary Americans

within the category of founding Anglophone culture.) One of the originating ways in which this map of Englishness was constructed, and one which remains central to the practices by which American visitors construe Britain to this day, was literary tourism: the seeking-out and re-description of sites of specifically literary interest, by which I mean sites associated variously with authors or with particular books. It is this element of travel-writing as it was practised by American writers of the early to mid nineteenth-century that is my subject here. Intent upon redacting the experience of visiting the old country for their readers in the new, these writers were especially alive to the implications, sentimental or ironic, of the act of trying to coalesce familiar texts with the ambiguously familiar and yet intractably foreign landscape to which they were related. I explore here how their writings, using the leverage of a common literary canon, seek to condense a usable version of Britain into words as a repository of, and pre-history to, an American cultural heritage. Or, to put it another way, I shall be investigating and describing one way in which, for nineteenth-century America, England became ‘storybook England’.

Before plunging into this exploration, however, it is worth suggesting something of what renders writing about literary tourist adventures distinctive within the broader practice of travel-writing. These emotional enterprises serve as something of a limit-case to the project of travel and travel-writing. After all, literary tourism, at any rate in the early nineteenth century, is a practice that involves visiting real places that have been read about beforehand in sorts of books – poems, novels, biographies -- that were not themselves primarily designed to describe places for tourists. Unlike much travel, it is not therefore inaugurated by travel-writing as a genre itself: it is one thing to go somewhere clutching a Baedeker, rather another to go there carrying a volume of Dickens. These visits are to places that the tourist has already in some sense visited; these ‘memorable places’ are not remembered after the visit, but actually remembered beforehand. Such tourism therefore involves a particular act of memory verification (or indeed, falsification) as it plots writing onto place. Moreover, this form of tourism is informed by the inevitable absence of the story it has arguably come ‘to see’, whether this is a story of the life of a now-dead writer, or an episode from his or her fictions. It involves visiting places that may simultaneously be both pre-story (if conceived as inspiration to the writer) and post-story (in the sense that they can be viewed as the ruins or residue of writerly inspiration). Either way,

however, this pursuit of what was conventionally termed ‘storied vicinities’ is a very unusual tourism, a tourism that expects to see only part of what it has come to see, supplying the rest (or failing to supply it) by hallucinatory acts of imagination fuelled by strategic re-reading. This peculiar but enduring way of re-consuming places already pre-used by writers took its time developing over the course of the nineteenth century.<sup>2</sup> What interests me here is the way in which it provided especial opportunities to diasporic writer-tourists intent upon constructing a national heritage of their own out of the materials of an English history and literature which in practice, despite 1776, they had only selectively renounced. Indeed, as I show below, writing about these peculiarities of literary tourist experience solved the problem of how to render Americans more entitled to inherit English heritage than the English.

The late nineteenth-century sense of ‘storybook England’ was derived from a tradition of American travel-writing that was inaugurated by Washington Irving’s essay on visiting Stratford-upon-Avon in his *Sketch Book* (1820), and further developed by his influential later essays on Abbotsford and Newstead Abbey, the homes of Sir Walter Scott and Lord Byron respectively. Irving’s itinerary was subsequently elaborated by a flurry of travel publications by important New York and Boston literati, amongst them: Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s *Letters from Abroad to Kindred at Home* (1840); James Fenimore Cooper’s *Gleanings in Europe: England* (1838); William Cullen Bryant’s *Letters of a Traveller; or, Notes of Things Seen in Europe and America* (1850); Grace Greenwood’s *Haps and Mishaps of a Tour in Europe* (1854); Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Sunny Memories of Foreign Lands* (1854); and, as already mentioned, Nathaniel Hawthorne’s *Our Old Home: A Series of English Sketches* (1863). Although the women generally use the familiar form of letters ‘written home’ while the men typically prefer the more formal genre of the essay or ‘sketch’, these texts do display common features. One is that they are explicitly and pointedly addressed to an American audience, despite being conscious of an English readership. The reviewer of Catharine Maria Sedgwick’s *Letters from Abroad to Kindred at Home* in the *London Examiner*, for example, notes that ‘[We] think it a great charm that she is thoroughly republican and New World-ish in her way of looking at the Old World’ (Damon-Bach and Clements, 209). Stowe’s preface requests ‘the English reader’ ‘to bear in mind that the book has not been prepared in reference to an English but an American public, and to make allowance for that fact’ (I, vi). Hawthorne hopes

for his volumes ‘no higher success than to represent to the American reader a few of the external aspects of English scenery and life’ (I, viii).

The other similarity between these travel-writings is that, taken together, there develops by mid-century a surprising consensus as to what the literary map of Britain looks like, and should look like, to American eyes. In the late 1830s, Sedgwick had confined herself in the matter of dead writers to visiting Poets’ Corner in Westminster Abbey, giving a miss both to Jane Austen’s grave in Winchester Cathedral (despite her admiration of Austen) and Thomas Gray’s churchyard at Stoke Poges (despite her admiration for Gray, and her visit to another site featured in his poetry, Eton). But by the fifties and early sixties, a core itinerary, based on Irving, seems to have emerged. This typically consisted of Poets’ Corner in Westminster Abbey, locations associated with Scott (mostly, but not exclusively in Scotland), the ‘homes and haunts’ of Robert Burns, and the inevitable Shakespearean sites in Stratford-upon-Avon. Individual tourists, it is true, did supplement this list of canonical sights; Greenwood, for example, visited Byron’s Newstead and Milton’s grave in Cripplegate, Stowe corrected Sedgwick’s omission by contemplating the locale immortalized in Thomas Gray’s *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*, and Hawthorne elected to visit the birthplace of Samuel Johnson in Lichfield and his childhood home in Uttoxeter. But these excursions were on the whole consciously individualistic or opportunistic embellishments. A brief glance at one influential mid-century publication dealing with visits to sites of literary interest, the English-authored William Howitt’s *The Homes and Haunts of the Most Eminent British Poets* (1847) confirms this sense of the overwhelming importance of Poets’ Corner, Burns, Scott and Shakespeare to American authors over all others. Even allowing for Howitt’s deliberately encyclopaedic ambition and for the fact that *Homes and Haunts* doesn’t for the most part purport to tell the story of Howitt’s own travels, he is still much more eclectic in the authors and sites he chooses to foreground than any comparable works by contemporary Americans.

The prominence of Burns, Scott, and Shakespeare, and the less frequent but characteristic excursus to locales associated with Gray, may be accounted for by the fact that they were all felt to be ‘national’ writers. In the case of Scott and Shakespeare they were felt to have either embodied or redacted the history and

sensibility of the national past with unrivalled power. In the case of Burns and Gray (and more problematically Shakespeare) they were thought to have celebrated typically Scottish and English landscapes, suffusing them with, from an American point of view, a usefully melancholy sentiment about a vanished but utterly desirable pastoral. Poets' Corner combined metropolitan convenience with a sense of the national canon fused with national history, and offered once again a chance to experience a refined melancholy for departed glories. Where else, then, would American writer-tourists develop their own sense of nation but in relation to these certified 'national' locations in the mother country? Over the mid years of the century, American writer-tourists accordingly developed a set of stances and tropes in order at once to lay claim to the sentimental experiences associated with such English national sites, and to exclude the English themselves from such sentimental experience.

Visiting England, the American tourist typically fell prey to a sense of the way that wherever she looked she was 'realising', verifying, and re-embodying remembered print representation. Catharine Sedgwick, writing in 1840, recorded her impression that 'History, painting, poetry, are at every moment becoming real, actual' (I, 13). Stowe recorded similar feelings on seeing Scotland, compounded for her beforehand of 'the views of Scotland which lay on my mother's table', 'the Scotch ballads, which were the delight of our evening fireside', 'the songs of Burns, which have been a household treasure among us', and 'the enchantments of Scott' (I, 41). 'It is so stimulating', she cries, 'to be where every name is a poem' (Stowe, I, 71). Tourism for Sedgwick thus overcomes the limitations of print culture even as it feeds upon it – 'There is nothing for you but to come and see these places; their soul, their history, their associations are untransfusable' (I, 26). Sometimes this experience of going beyond print culture, as here, was euphoric, but sometimes it seems to have been melancholic. For Sedgwick, for instance, the experience of visiting Poets' Corner was one of unexpected bereavement: 'You approach nearer to [your favourite writers] than ever before, but it is in sympathy with their mortality. You *realise* for the first time that they are dead; for who, of all your friends, are so living as they?' (I, 48).

Sedgwick's sense of the deadness of these classic writers is relatively unusual; more usual amongst American writers is an effort to imbue the 'long-buried dead' with 'all

the freshness of actual life.’ Grace Greenwood, touring and writing some fourteen years later, rather specialised in this sort of experiential experimentation, seen to advantage in her account of her visit to Burns’ birthplace:

I never remember to have felt a more exquisite sense of beauty, a delight more deep and delicious, though shadowed with sad and regretful memories, than while sitting or strolling on the lovely banks of Doon, half cheated by excited fancy with the hope that I might see the rustic poet leaning over the picturesque ‘auld brig,’ following, with his great, dark, dreamy eyes, the windings of the stream below... Greenwood, 129-30)

Greenwood achieves this animation of the poet partly by imaginative visual enhancement of a real landscape and partly by quotation from memory which allows her to give voice to the imagined phantom, and so to coalesce their two beings:<sup>3</sup>

As I lingered there, countless snatches of the poet’s songs, and stanza after stanza of long-forgotten poems, sprang to my lips; rare thoughts, the sweet flowers of his genius, seemed suddenly to blossom out from all the hidden nooks and still, shaded places of memory... (Greenwood, 130)

At Abbotsford, she uses the display of Walter Scott’s last suit of clothes as the cue for a similar act of revivification, based on her reading of Lockhart’s biography: ‘These brought the picture of the grand old man, worn down and broken before his time, with wondrous vividness before me. I could see him as he tottered about his grounds, or sat in the shade of some favourite tree, with his faithful Willie Laidlaw...’ (Greenwood, 147). She efficiently brings herself to tears over this vision, and then achieves the same physical disturbance in the study: ‘I felt the air surcharged with the living magnetism of his genius. So *near* he seemed, so strangely recent his presence, so inevitable his speedy return, my mind grew bewildered, and my heart beat hurriedly and half expectantly’ (Greenwood, 147).

To realise and embody the dead writer in this rather spectacularly naive fashion was aggressively to assert an American claim to the dead as ‘ours’ by right of superior sentiment. Greenwood comments of London, for example, that ‘my head seems dizzied and my heart drunken with the very atmosphere of London, surcharged, as it seems, with the grandest, fearfullest, proudest, and mournfullest memories of our common race; for I tell my English friends that the great far past is *ours* as well as

theirs' (31). (She does not record their response.) Even more strikingly, her mostly highly conventional reactions to visiting Stratford-upon-Avon include a fantasised expulsion of English modernity from the place:

I was disagreeably struck by the smart, insolent newness of some of the buildings on my way, and by the modern dress and air of the people. How I hated the flaring shop windows, with their display of cheap ribbons, and prints, and flashy silks. But I was comforted by a goodly number of quaint and moss-grown houses, and I could have blessed a company of strolling players and ballad singers, who had collected a gaping crowd in an open square, for being in harmony somewhat with the place. I could have willed Stratford and all its inhabitants to have been wrapped for ever in a charmed sleep, like that of the fairy tale, when Shakspeare was laid to his rest in that picturesque old church on the banks of the Avon. (Greenwood, 20-1)

It is instructive to compare Greenwood's account with Stowe's, published in the same year. Stowe's volumes reveal a similar appetite for seeing England as 'history', for preserving Britain forever in the role of America's favourite museum. She describes her journey to Stratford as a journey into the past, perhaps even into a quasi-Freudian pre-history: 'Deep down in our hearts we were going back to English days; the cumbrous, quaint, queer, old, picturesque times; the dim, haunted times between cock-crowing and morning; those hours of national childhood...' (Stowe, I, 195). On the other hand, Stowe recounts several incidents in which her American appetite for mapping history and poetry onto the landscape, and her concomitant desire for emotional experimentation, meets with a variety of inconveniences. One of the funnier episodes she records is regarding her visit to Bothwell Bridge, 'which Scott has immortalized in *Old Mortality*':

We walked up and down, trying to recall the scenes of the battle, as there described, and were rather mortified, after we had all our associations comfortably located upon it, to be told it was not the same bridge – it has been newly built, widened, and otherwise made more comfortable and convenient.

Of course, this was evidently for the benefit of society; but it was certainly one of those cases where the poetical suffers for the practical. (Stowe, I, 65-6)

Rather later, they project a visit inspired by Gray: 'We were bent upon looking up the church which gave rise to [Gray's] *Elegy in a Country Churchyard*, intending, when we got there, to have a little scene over it' (Stowe, II, 46). They find a churchyard



‘embowered in mossy elms, with a most ancient and goblin yew-tree, an ivy-mantled tower, all perfect as could be’ (Stowe, II, 46), where they repeat the *Elegy* and go into the appropriate raptures; but,

After all, imagine our chagrin on being informed that we had not been to the genuine churchyard....However...we could ...console ourselves with the reflection that the emotion was admirable, and wanted only the right place to make it the most appropriate in the world. (Stowe, II, 47)

In Stratford, Stowe insists upon visiting (as her English companion puts it, teasing her afterwards) ‘Shakspeare’s house, when it wasn’t his house’ and for being ‘so earnest to get sprigs from his mulberry, when it wasn’t his mulberry’. Stowe’s comment -- ‘We were quite ready to allow the foolishness of the thing, and join in the laugh at our own expense’ (I, 214) -- suggests that in these incidents there is something of a struggle for authority over ownership of place – and indicates the problem of matching American sentiments of ownership with the prior claims of the natives.

Stowe solves this by both indulging and ironising American sentiment.<sup>4</sup> In this respect her long account of her second visit to Melrose Abbey at night – as famously recommended in Scott’s best-selling poem *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* -- is instructive, because it is undertaken in defiance of the party’s understanding that Scott himself never visited the Abbey by ‘the pale moonlight’ described in his poem. They set off, ‘threading the narrow streets of the village with the comforting reflection that we were doing what Sir Walter would think a rather silly thing’ (Stowe, I, 165). The prose oscillates comically between the well-read sentimental and the hard-headedly practical, both construed as eminently American:

We walked up and down the long aisles, and groped out into the cloisters; and then I thought, to get the full ghostliness of the thing, we would go up the old, ruined staircase into the long galleries, that

‘Midway thread the abbey wall’

We got about half way up, when there came into our faces one of those sudden passionate puffs of mist and rain....Whish! came the wind in our faces, like the rustling of a whole army of spirits down the staircase; whereat we all tumbled back promiscuously on to each other, and concluded we would not go up. In fact we had done the thing, and so we went home.... (Stowe, I, 167-8)

It is, however, Hawthorne's collection of 'sketches' of England, *Our Old Home*, drafted in Concord, Massachusetts at the outbreak of the Civil War in 1863 from Notebooks compiled over the previous decade while he was working in Liverpool as American consul, which definitively establishes the grounds on which Susan Coolidge's teenage heroine will come to make her own claim to superior rights over English culture. According to Hawthorne's preface, the material he had collected was originally to have served as 'the side-screens and backgrounds and exterior adornment' of a romance set in England, but under the impact of the Civil War and the threatened break-up of the American nation, Hawthorne says that he abandoned romance in favour of scattering 'a thousand peaceful fantasies' (Hawthorne, ix). The peaceful, reunifying fantasy that Hawthorne has to offer to his riven home-country is that of England as a common 'home.'

It was not new to fantasise England as 'home.' Sedgwick had noted that 'an Anglo-American [cannot] come to this, his ancestral home, without a pride in his relationship to it, and an extended sense of the obligations imposed by his derivation from the English stock' (I, 116). Stowe framed her letters with a similar assertion of genetic relation expanded into a sense of common cultural inheritance:

Say what we will, an American, particularly a New Englander, can never approach the old country without a thrill and pulsation of kindred. Its history for two centuries was our history. Its literature, laws, and language are our literature, laws and language. Spenser, Shakspeare, Bacon, Milton, were a glorious inheritance, which we share in common. Our very life-blood is English life-blood (Stowe, I, 18).<sup>5</sup>

Hawthorne reconceives this trope to make the England of *Our Old Home* into a common American inheritance which may serve to reunite a nation temporarily divided. Although Hawthorne is exercised by the danger that an American will be seduced and destroyed by the fantasy of inheriting England, most especially in the first of the essays which provides a gallery of portraits of Americans stranded in England as expatriates, he is nonetheless interested in crafting such a fantasy, and he does so by recording his visits to 'famous localities' (including Poets' Corner, Shakespeare's Stratford, Johnson's Lichfield, and Burns' Ayrshire): 'I hope that I do not compromise my American patriotism by acknowledging that I was often

conscious of a fervent hereditary attachment to the native soil of our forefathers, and felt it to be our own Old Home' (I, 58-9).

Making England into 'our old home' demands a number of strategies. It involves, for instance, making England into an American memory:

Almost always, in visiting such scenes as I have been attempting to describe, I had a singular sense of having been there before....This was a bewildering, yet very delightful emotion, fluttering about me like a faint summer wind, and filling my imagination with a thousand half-remembrances, which looked as vivid as sunshine, but faded quite away whenever I attempted to grasp and define them. Of course, the explanation of the mystery was, that history, poetry, and fiction, books of travel, and the talk of tourists, had given me pretty accurate preconceptions of the common objects of English scenery, and these, being long ago vivified by a youthful fancy, had insensibly taken their place among the images of things actually seen. Yet the illusion was often so powerful, that I almost doubted whether such airy remembrances might not be a sort of innate idea, the print of a recollection in some ancestral mind, transmitted with fainter and fainter impress through several descents, to my own. I felt, indeed, like the stalwart progenitor in person, returning to the hereditary haunts after more than two hundred years, and finding the church, the hall, the farm-house, the cottage, hardly changed during his long absence...while his own affinities for these things, a little obscured by disuse, were reviving at every step. (Hawthorne, I, 97-8)

Hawthorne's language here translates the 'memories' of the merely well-read into personal pseudo-memories, and thence into genetic rights to inheritance. Indeed, he transforms himself from the heir to memories to the 'progenitor' of such memory, the original holder of the property, making a buried reference to Washington Irving's tale 'Rip Van Winkle' and thus to the literary progenitor of *Our Old Home*, Irving's *Sketch Book*.

Elsewhere, Hawthorne develops other claims to England as an American heritage property, including the superior (in that it is both alienated and touristically conscientious) sensibility of Americans which allows them imaginatively to populate England with glamorous ghosts:

It is well that America exists, if it were only that her vagrant children may be impressed and affected by the historical monuments of England to a degree of which the native inhabitants are evidently incapable. These matters are too familiar, too real, and too hopelessly built in and amongst and mixed up with

the common objects and affairs of life, to be easily susceptible of imaginative colouring in their minds; and even their poets and romancers find it a toil, and almost a delusion, to extract poetic material out of what seems embodied poetry itself to an American. An Englishman cares nothing about the Tower, which to us is a haunted castle in a dreamland. That honest and excellent gentleman, the late Mr. G.P.R. James (whose mechanical ability, one might have supposed, would nourish itself by devouring every stone of such a structure), once assured me that he had never in his life set eyes upon the Tower, though for years an historic novelist in London. (Hawthorne, II, 145-6)

Hawthorne elaborates this view with regard to Uttoxeter. Here he quizzes a boy born and bred in the market town in which Dr Johnson once did a self-imposed penance for a remembered disobedience to his father, and discovers that the boy is entirely ignorant of the anecdote. Hawthorne breaks out eventually into these exasperated reflections:

Just think of the absurd little town knowing nothing of the only memorable incident which ever happened within its boundaries since the old Britons built it, this sad and lovely story, which consecrates this spot...in the heart of a stranger from three thousand miles over the sea! It but confirms what I have been saying, that sublime and beautiful facts are best understood when etherealized by distance. (Hawthorne, I, 225)

Hawthorne effectively makes the claim that the transatlantic tourist does not in fact, as Sedgwick would have it, have 'to come and see these places; [because] their soul, their history, their associations are untransfusable' (Sedgwick, I, 26); for Hawthorne, they are eminently 'transfusable' over distance, in fact, they are more meaningful to distant Americans than to mere locals.

With regard to Stratford, in particular, the most remarkable of all these famous places, Hawthorne goes further, experimenting with a more extreme stance, coming to dismiss or at any rate question the desirability of touring such locations at all:

I should consider it unfair to quit Shakspeare's house without the frank acknowledgement that I was conscious of not the slightest emotion while viewing it, nor any quickening of the imagination. This has often happened to me in my visits to memorable places. Whatever pretty and apposite reflections I may have made on the subject had either occurred to me before I ever saw Stratford, or have been elaborated since. (Hawthorne, I, 158)

The power of such places resides in fact in their ‘memorableness’ in the personal and collective imagination, rather than in their contemporary physical actuality. Moreover, Hawthorne also goes on to say that although he has ‘form[ed] a more sensible and vivid idea of Shakspeare as a flesh-and-blood individual now that I have stood on the kitchen-hearth and in the birth-chamber’ he is ‘not quite sure that this power of realization is altogether desirable in reference to a great poet’ (I, 159). (Elsewhere, he adopts the same position in relation to Burns). Here Hawthorne, abandoning the techniques practised so extensively by Greenwood, implicitly privileges the power of transatlantic textuality over that of the merely local English person.

Something of what this ‘storybook England’ would come to look like when it was fully established, and something of the way in which it would come to be consumed, may be conveyed by taking a look at the synopsis provided by Sarah Chauncey Woolsey, writing as ‘Susan Coolidge’, in *What Katy Did Next* (1886), the sequel to *What Katy Did* (1872). It is of interest here because, as a fiction aimed at an post-Civil War adolescent American audience, it crystallises in a small space what is meant to be a representative itinerary and appropriate tourist sentiments and stances for the novice traveller faced with the wonders of the Old World, and most especially, with England’s thick patina of literary associations.

Katy begins her European tour, undertaken as companion to Mrs Ashe and her young daughter Amy, by taking the boat to ‘Storybook England.’ She travels down from Liverpool to spend time in London, with excursions westwards to Oxford and Stratford-upon-Avon, and southwards to Winchester, Salisbury, and the Isle of Wight, although the mandatory excursion up north via Lincoln and York to the land of Burns and Scott is in the event rained off. Although Katy is fictional, her travels were firmly based on Woolsey’s own European tour in 1870-2 (itself influenced by the account of Amy March’s travels in Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* (1868)), and her vision of literary England is meant to capture what an educated American girl would and should think of England. *What Katy Did Next* accordingly details with admirable simplicity and speed a strongly literary itinerary, together with the emotional responses then suitable to a transatlantic enthusiast trying to match her reading to the contemporary reality of Victorian England. Her bookcase of literary reference is

impressive, comprising both classics and the up-to-date, ranging across novels, memoirs, poetry, biography, and essays. She eats muffins, which she has read about in Dickens, and finds it a disappointing experience, given that ‘muffins sound so very good in Dickens, you know’ (Coolidge, 60). She decides to stay at Batt’s Hotel on Dover Street, ‘because it was mentioned in Miss Edgeworth’s *Patronage*’. “‘It was the place,’ she explained, “where Godfrey Percy didn’t stay when Lord Oldborough sent him the letter.”’ (Though, as the narrator comments with some irony, ‘It seemed an odd enough reason for going anywhere, that a person in a novel didn’t stay there’ Coolidge, 70.) En route to the hotel, she spots Wimpole Street, identifying it as ‘the street where Maria Crawford in *Mansfield Park*, you know, “opened one of the best houses” after she had married Mr. Rushworth’ (Coolidge, 70). When it comes to planned sightseeing around London, she opts ‘like ninety-nine Americans out of a hundred’ (Coolidge, 73) for Westminster Abbey and Poets’ Corner. Subsequently, having made a list of ‘some of the places I know about in books – novels as well as history – and the places where the people who wrote the books lived’ (Coolidge, 78), she

visited the Charter-House, where Thackeray went to school, and the Home of the Poor Brothers connected with it, in which Colonel Newcome answered ‘Adsum’ to the roll-call of the angels. They took a look at the small house in Curzon Street, which is supposed to have been in Thackeray’s mind when he described the residence of Becky Sharp; and the other house in Russell Square which is unmistakably that where George Osborne courted Amelia Sedley. They went to service in the delightful old church of St. Mary in the Temple, and thought of *Ivanhoe* and Brian de Bois-Guilbert and Rebecca the Jewess. From there Mr. Beach took them to Lamb’s court, where Pendennis and George Warrington dwelt in chambers together; and to Brick Court, where Oliver Goldsmith passed so much of his life, and the little rooms in which Charles and Mary Lamb passed so many sadly happy years. On another day they drove to Whitefriars, for the sake of Lord Glenvarloch and the old privilege of Sanctuary in *The Fortunes of Nigel*; and took a peep at Bethnal Green, where the Blind Beggar and his ‘Pretty Bessee’ lived, and at the old Prison of the Marshalsea, made interesting by its associations with *Little Dorrit*. They also went to see Milton’s house and St Giles Church, in which he is buried, and stood a long time before St. James’ Palace, trying to make out which could have been Miss Burney’s windows when she was dresser to Queen Charlotte of bitter memory. And they saw Paternoster Row, and No.5 Cheyne Walk, sacred forevermore to the memory of Thomas Carlyle....and by great good luck had a glimpse of George Eliot getting out of a cab. (Coolidge, 78-9)

The itinerary described here assumes that the teenage girl readers to whom it was addressed would be familiar with a bookshelf containing *Patronage*, *Mansfield Park*, *Vanity Fair*, *The Newcomes*, *Ivanhoe*, *The Fortunes of Nigel*, *Little Dorrit*, the biographies of some London-based writers – Thackeray, Carlyle, Fanny Burney, the Lambs --, and even Chettle and Day's Jacobean play-of-the-ballad, *The Blind Beggar of Bethnal Green*.

Katy adopts a number of stances which by this time were becoming conventional. The first is a sense that England may be consumed most attractively and rewardingly as 'just like a dream or a story' (Coolidge, 70). Katy's literary itinerary, for example, notably flattens out any hierarchy of authenticity between the biographical and the fictional, and between dead writers and live writers. Katy's London is notable for its eclectic simultaneity, part biography, part fiction, ranging (courtesy of Scott) from the medieval through the Jacobean, the Georgian, and so right through to the contemporary literary scene. It is disappointing when things do not seem quite correspond to favourite texts, as Katy consoles herself for the 'uninteresting and old-fashioned' Wimpole Street with the reflection that 'Miss Austen wrote her novels nearly a century ago, that London was a 'growing' place, and that things were probably much changed since that day' (Coolidge, 71). Conversely, it is agreeable when the natives appear, like the landlady and waiter at the hotel, to have stepped out of a book, mere extensions of the located literary works the tourist is touring: 'exactly such a landlady sailed forth to welcome them as they had often met with in books....She alone would have been worth crossing the ocean to see, they all declared' (Coolidge, 71). The act of superimposing the classic text upon the realities to make up a storybook England produces habits of appropriation which involve constructing the British and their landscapes as themselves strangely fictitious.

If Katy's ability to dream England through literary reference is made possible by the range of her and her readers' reading, her ability actually to identify sites and sights is, tellingly, made possible by her guide, 'a quaint elderly American, who had lived for twenty years in London and knew it much better than most Londoners do' (Coolidge, 77). The suggestion dropped in here, that an American would be more at home in London, would know it better, read it better, and value it more than a Londoner, is amplified in the account Katy gives of her excursion to Winchester to

view the tomb of Jane Austen (the inscription on which famously omits to mention her novels) in the cathedral there:

They laid a few rain-washed flowers upon the tomb, and listened with edification to the verger, who inquired:

‘Whatever was it, ma’am, that lady did which brought so many h’Americans to h’ask about her? Our h’English people don’t seem to take the same h’interest.’

‘She wrote such delightful stories,’ explained Katy; but the old verger shook his head.

‘I think h’it must be some other party, miss....It stands to reason, miss, that we’d have heard of ‘em h’over ‘ere in England sooner than you would h’over there in h’America, if the books ‘ad been h’anything so h’extraordinary’ (Coolidge, 76-7).

This vignette is characteristic of late nineteenth-century transatlantic travel-writing in which, typically, the natives are astoundingly ignorant of their literary heritage, so as to leave it, as here, available for better-informed appropriation by the American visitor. After Hawthorne, ‘Storybook England’ as a whole, is more available, more present, to Americans than to natives, which is why Katy’s elderly expatriate Yankee guide knows more about London than does the Londoner, and why Katy and her companions typically have more suitable sentiments and have read more, and more thoughtfully, than the natives. This insistence on the greater sentimental openness of Americans to English texts and the English past lays strong claim to a literary heritage supposedly undervalued or misunderstood by the native English. It also claims that not just literary London but by extension the whole of Britain is read most accurately and usefully as a historical novel laid out for the well-read American. It had taken some fifty years to develop that easy, unthreatened Anglophilia, that sense of the possibility and desirability of ranging across the country with ‘a terribly long list of graves to visit’ (Coolidge, 76).

Nathaniel Hawthorne, though, was perhaps to become a posthumous victim of his own success as a literary tourist and travel-writer. Although one undertone of *Our Old Home* may be that England is now obsolete, its literary heritage understood and kept alive more vigorously in the hearts and minds of Americans than in modern England itself, one of the book’s long-term effects has been a continuing stream of Americans going to England to see its literary sites, if only to savour just how



anticlimactic and irrelevant their settings in banal everyday Britain now are. What these modern American literary tourists generally don't do in such numbers, however, is to visit Hawthorne's birthplace back in Salem, Massachusetts, or his various houses, or the settings of his novels, or his grave. Successfully stealing English literary geography as America's, in the long term the nineteenth-century American writers I have been describing seem to have risked being dispossessed of their own.

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<sup>1</sup> Much of the work done to date on nineteenth-century American travel-writing has focussed upon American reactions to Italy and Europe more generally: see especially, Mary Suzanne Schriber, *Writing Home: American Women Abroad 1830-1920*; Sara Mills, *Discourses of Difference: An Analysis of Women's Travel Writing and Colonialism* (1991); William W. Stowe, *Going Abroad: European Travel in Nineteenth-century American Culture* (1994). However, see the essays by Shirley Foster and Paul Westover in Nicola J. Watson ed. *Literary Tourism and Nineteenth-Century Culture* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2009), both of which deal with American writers' responses to British literary sites. Foster considers tourist strategies of enhancement and self-ironisation; Westover is interested in the rhetoric by which writers variously claim English heritage. Considering some of the same material,

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my own essay builds on their work to develop a rather different view of the project of American literary tourists.

<sup>2</sup> For a fuller account of this process, see my *The Literary Tourist: Readers and Places in Romantic and Victorian Britain* (Houndmills: Palgrave, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> I derive the term 'enhancement' from Foster, cited above.

<sup>4</sup> For more on American self-ironisation, see Foster, cited above.

<sup>5</sup> On this point see Westover, cited above.