"Newstead and I stand or fall together": Memorial Ecology and Multispecies Agency in Byron's Early Poetry

Taylore Ann Wintch
Brigham Young University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd

Part of the Arts and Humanities Commons

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation
Wintch, Taylore Ann, "'Newstead and I stand or fall together': Memorial Ecology and Multispecies Agency in Byron's Early Poetry" (2022). Theses and Dissertations. 9574.
https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/9574

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.
“Newstead and I stand or fall together”: Memorial Ecology and Multispecies Agency in Byron’s Early Poetry

Taylore Ann Wintch

A thesis submitted to the faculty of Brigham Young University in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Paul A. Westover, Chair
Nicholas A. Mason
Sharon J. Harris

Department of English
Brigham Young University

Copyright © 2022 Taylore Ann Wintch
All Rights Reserved
ABSTRACT

“Newstead and I stand or fall together”: Memorial Ecology and Multispecies Agency in Byron’s Early Poetry

Taylore Ann Wintch
Department of English, BYU
Master of Arts

Scholars studying memory, literary tourism, and Byron all note the cooperation between author and audience at work in memorials—be it in terms of speech and response, hospitality and reception, or memory and forgetting. None, however, address the environment at Newstead as an agentic being involved with Byron’s memorial legacy. Byron acknowledged multispecies beings as important actors in his eventual legacy. Through some of his early poems, we see the land under and around Newstead Abbey, as well as its nonhuman life, exercising agency and affecting Byron’s memory. I limit my analysis to Byron’s early poetry partly to trace how a younger, more earnest Byron relied on Romantic memory-building culture and partly to focus on the effects that Newstead had on Byron’s legacy. My primary objects of study are the following poems: “On Leaving Newstead Abbey” (composed 1803), “To an Oak in the Garden of Newstead Abbey” (1807), “Elegy on Newstead Abbey” (1807), and “Inscription on the Monument of a Newfoundland Dog” (1808). Each of these addresses the Byrons’ ancestral estate as an ecology which Byron imbued with poetic purpose, and the core location of his youthful legacy-building project. I address the poems in chronological order to show how Byron recruits and unites different voices to support his legacy.

Focusing on Newstead in this sense sheds light on any number of related phenomena pertaining to Byronism, especially monuments, Byron’s home, and other aspects of material culture that honored Byron’s posthumous legacy. Given that, within years of writing these four poems, Byron would become known worldwide as the quintessential Romantic poet, his ancestral home, like other things and spaces that came to stand in for him, offers a highly useful and arguably paradigmatic case study. That it is not just a monument, but a composite being acting in and made up of literal and memorial ecosystems, suggests a kind of memorial agency or voice emerging from Newstead. This influence supports what Byron poetically speaks about and into Newstead and expands our notion of what effective memorials entail, effectively advocating for more and better study of environmental actors within reception studies.

Keywords: Lord Byron, posthumous reception, Newstead Abbey, memorial ecology, literary tourism, multispecies agency, performativity
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Title .................................................................................................................................................. i

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... ii

Table of Contents ........................................................................................................................... iii

“Newstead and I stand or fall together”: Memorial Ecology and Multispecies Agency .......... 1

Building a Memorial Ecology..................................................................................................... 6

“On Leaving Newstead Abbey” (1803)........................................................................................ 9

“To an Oak in the Garden of Newstead Abbey” (composed 1807, published 1832)............ 15

“Elegy on Newstead Abbey” (1807).......................................................................................... 20

“Inscription on the Monument of a Newfoundland Dog” (1808).......................................... 22

Newstead’s Legacy ..................................................................................................................... 25

Works Cited .................................................................................................................................. 33
"Newstead and I stand or fall together": Memorial Ecology and Multispecies Agency in Byron’s Early Poetry

Oh! yet, if maturity’s years may be thine,

Though I shall lie low in the cavern of death,

On thy leaves yet the day-beam of ages may shine,

Uninjured by time, or the rude winter’s breath. (Byron, “To an Oak,” lines 25–28)

The dead inevitably exert force upon the living. They commandeer mental and physical space through memorials, traditions, and, in the case of the literary dead, written words. Some of the illustrious dead have transformed themselves, or have been transformed by posterity, into books, places, and relics—forms of symbolic embodiment and speech. My thesis addresses literary memorials in ways that prove useful for theorizing the relationships between the literary dead, their living posterity, and physical environments—and, more broadly, for showing how performative language and bodies interact in nineteenth-century literary legacies. Alison Booth, Nicola Watson, Samantha Matthews, and Paul Westover, among others, have noted that in memorial practice, graves, personal items, and spaces associated with the literary dead become pilgrimage sites and hallowed ground, absorbing the memory of the commemorated person. In this sense, writers (with the help of others) solidify their memory in materiality and more-than-human life, or substance, that outlasts them. Additionally, theorizing memorials not only as a material reality but also as a symbiotic one helps us to see multiple communities, human and not, acting in ecologies of memorial practice.

Authors, along with the communities who receive them, act in memorial ecologies according to their differing agencies and lived experience. In his What the Victorians Made of
**Romanticism**, Tom Mole uses a model of media ecology to discuss the evolution of literary reception in the Victorian period—a model I adapt in this paper to represent how multispecies literary memorials are developed. What Mole says about media can certainly apply to the different agencies (human and nonhuman) involved in a memorial ecology: “The idea of a media ecology foregrounds the relations among media, the ways in which each medium is shaped by the others, and the ways in which those relations change over time” (*What the Victorians* 18–19).

Just as media interact with other media, rather than just replacing them in a cycle of supersession, so too do different actors, human and environmental, historical and modern, human and environmental, interact to form an ecology of memory (*What the Victorians* 18).

Understanding memorial practice in ecological terms combines reception studies with environmental theory and expands our traditional sense of what Romantic reception involves. As Watson, Booth, and Matthews, among others have argued, the living and the dead interact with each other in memorial practice. What these scholars might explore more fully is the potential environments (past, present, and future) also have to interact with the living and the dead. To be sure, all of them explore the importance of place in their mediations on literary landscape, but none of them theorizes literary landscape as a composite ecological system with its own kind of agency.

The agency of place and environment provides settings for authorial legacy that allow for tangible, transtemporal connection between author and audience. Romantic-era writers and memorialists seem to have been particularly primed for such connection in both material and ideological ways. Eighteenth and nineteenth century Britain experienced a surplus of published material, broad access to critical periodicals, a growing tradition of literary tourism, aggressive canonization projects, a flowering of literary biography, the idealized persona of the Romantic
poet, and a rich discourse about literary immortality. In his monograph about Romantic reception culture, Andrew Bennett observes, “our highest praise for any poem, still, is to say that it will last, that it will live on, in the future, beyond the particular contingent circumstances of its author’s life and beyond its contemporary reception” (4). By this measure, the greatest marker of literary celebrity—still influenced by Romantic-era modes of thinking—is remembrance. Fame was hardly a novel ambition in the Romantic period, but, as multiple scholars (Bennett among them) have demonstrated, the Romantics courted posthumous remembrance with special urgency.

Lord Byron worked toward such remembrance and became the quintessential Romantic celebrity-poet, experiencing a level of audience interest and interaction impossible for most of his predecessors and remarkable to his successors. Some notable publications on this subject include John Beckett and Sheila Aley’s *Byron and Newstead* (2001), Tom Mole’s *Byron’s Romantic Celebrity* (2007), and J. Andrew Hubbell’s *Byron’s Nature* (2018). Byron’s persona, his travels, and his death made myths for his contemporary and posthumous audiences. Yet his writing, despite its focus on poetic subjectivity and self-making, was not purely self-centered. As John Wilson noted in *The Edinburgh Review* in 1818, Byron “looks upon his readers as sentient existences that are important in his poetic existence” (99). In other words, Byron’s poems, for all their interest in constructing the charismatic self, were also engaged in constructing readers (who in turn would help construct that self) and recruiting them for certain kinds of response. Byron embraced and magnified legacy-building trends that demonstrate acute awareness of audience’s role in his legacy—trends recent reception scholars have explored. Lucy Newlyn, Alison Lockwood, Tom Mole, and Ann Rigney, along with the previously mentioned scholars, have
unfolded various processes through which audiences influenced and revitalized legacies like Byron’s.

Scholars studying memory, literary tourism, and Byron all note the cooperation between author and audience at work in memorials—be it in terms of speech and response, hospitality and reception, or memory and forgetting. None, however, address the environment at Newstead as a multispecies agent involved with Byron’s memorial legacy. In chronicling Byron’s inclusion of this environment in his early poems’ legacy-building work, we see that, in addition to human culture affecting the material reality of Newstead Abbey, the land under and around it, as well as its nonhuman life, exercises memorial agency and influences Romantic reception. More than just various human audiences and their reception of Byron, these environmental voices affect the memorial ecology and discourse of Byron’s memory; they are integral to Byron’s powerful speech in that through them, his memory is preserved. This crafted memorial ecology supports J. A. Hubbell’s assertion that, despite occupying a “marginal position in Romantic ecocritical studies,” Byron “display[s] a deep understanding of the fundamental interdependence of human and non-human, organic and inorganic” (1, 5).

Throughout this paper, I will first analyze the Newstead environment as an imagined extension of Byron’s will: a place that served first his physical body, then his and his posterity’s legacy-building work. Then, I address Newstead as independent actor, or rather as a gathering of interdependent actors—and how it lends environmental, nonhuman agency to Byron’s memorialization. Within years of writing these four poems, Byron would become known worldwide as the quintessential Romantic poet, so his ancestral home, like other things and spaces that came to stand in for him, offers a highly useful and arguably paradigmatic case study. That it is not just a monument, but a composite being acting in and made up of natural and
memorial ecosystems, suggests a kind of memorial agency or voice emerging from Newstead. This apparent influence supports what Byron poetically speaks about and into Newstead and expands our notion of what effective memorialization, and Romantic reception to an extent, entails. Thus, the environments connected to Romantic authors and writing (as well as literary legacy in general), deserve more attention as active participants in reception studies than they have received previously.

I limit my analysis to Byron’s early poetry, partly to trace how a younger, more earnest Byron relied on Romantic memory-building culture and partly to focus on the effects that living at Newstead Abbey had on Byron. His poetry before the blockbuster success of *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* (Cantos I and II) in 1812 was arguably more performative and concerned with legacy-building than it would be later in his career. Most other reception studies of Byron, understandably, focus on the period after he “awoke and found [himself] famous” but neglect the long-term cultural import of his more juvenile poetry (Moore, Vol. 1, 347). Nicholas Mason addresses Byron’s claim to “overnight fame” in his monograph on literary advertising and suggests that the process by which Byron gained fame involved less serendipity and more careful strategy than has usually been acknowledged (65). Byron’s legacy-building work appears throughout his early poetry and relies on environmental actors for its efficacy. My primary objects of study are Byron’s poems “On Leaving Newstead Abbey” (composed 1803), “To an Oak in the Garden of Newstead Abbey” (1807), “Elegy on Newstead Abbey” (1807), and “Inscription on the Monument of a Newfoundland Dog” (1808). Each of these addresses the Byrons’ ancestral estate as an ecology which Byron imbued with poetic purpose, and the core location of his youthful legacy-building project. I address the poems in chronological order to show how Byron recruits and unites different voices to support his legacy.
Building a Memorial Ecology

Through these poems, Byron connects his life and legacy to Newstead Abbey and its surroundings rather than just the people who lived in it. These poems—somewhat obscure works today, though well known to nineteenth-century enthusiasts—are positioned at the beginning of Byron’s career when he had not yet experienced the height of his fame, recalling his need to exercise more purposeful, self-conscious, aspirational agency in his legacy-building. We can identify his self-memorializing impulse in his citations of the environment and its potential agency, his imagination of the works’ reception, and his embrace of commonplaces of literary heritage, which together make up a memorial ecology for his future. Characteristic of his 1807 debut collection, *Hours of Idleness* (though not all these poems were published immediately), these works make bids for immortality by citing now-traditional Romantic themes like nature, tradition, and memory. Yet, their seeming unoriginality and embrace of convention serve to illuminate their cultural moment—a moment in which Byron, as a budding poet with a recently-inherited title, intentionally engaged.

For example, Byron understood that authors’ homes were becoming important foci of memorial energy. As Booth notes in her *Homes and Haunts*, “Interest in the homes and aesthetic retreats of Alexander Pope or Horace Walpole, fused with Romanticism’s taste for the antique and picturesque, encouraged celebrated writers of the nineteenth century such as Walter Scott to design their own premises” (5). Of course, Byron did not design or build Newstead, but he did invest considerable energy in shaping the house and its grounds as memorial terrain,

1 “On Leaving Newstead Abbey” and “Elegy on Newstead Abbey” both appeared in *Hours of Idleness*. “Inscription” was first published in J. C. Hobhouse’s 1809 *Imitations and Translations from the Ancient and Modern Classics, Together with Original Poems Never Before Published*, with the initials “L. B.” printed at the end and Byron’s authorship acknowledged in the preface. “To an Oak at Newstead” was published after the poet’s death.
participating in the cultivation of literary landscape—the location of personal legacy in place—that became perhaps more strongly associated with Byron’s older contemporaries, Scott and Wordsworth. The young Byron grounded his legacy-building efforts in a physical location and multispecies agency to solidify his future influence. In its treatment of Newstead and its surroundings, each poem discussed in this essay presents a case study in which Byron’s, and perhaps any author’s, legacy depends on the agency or (to borrow from Jane Bennett) “thing-power” of a non-human, natural being in addition to human posterity (Bennett 2). Each poem imagines, in other words, a memory ecology made up of various interdependent agents, living and inanimate, human and otherwise. Byron himself would not have used terminology from memory studies or the environmental humanities, but he understood or intuited certain concepts that those disciplines have since named and analyzed—among them the notions of nonhuman and multispecies agency.

Agency is not limited to the human speaker in Byron’s early poems. Rather, it is taken up by a tree, a building, the land. Each of these entities, human or not, has material requirements for its existence as well as poetic significance crafted by Byron, and participates in an ecology with Byron and his literary posterity. Byron’s poetry has a forceful effect on the landscape at Newstead in that the land is connected to Byron, and the poetry is validated and empowered by the landscape in that the homestead environment seems to support its poetic interpretation. The poetic force seems dependent not only upon the environmental actors it involves, but also upon literary posterity and custodians as well. Byron, through his poetry, lifestyle, and reception, began work on a memorial ecology that would extend beyond his life and contemporaries, including nonhuman and human beings long after Byron the man had dissolved into legend and earth. This memorial ecology is made up of an amalgamation of different voices speaking and
responding to each other—together forming a kind of multifaceted memorial voice with unifying purpose: to lobby for or support Byron’s memory. Theories of performativity offer a useful framework for assessing these different voices. J. L. Austin, for example, separates the force of an utterance, like the power exerted in Byron’s texts, from the effect or act of that utterance on a listener or reader. Austin calls the force of the text illocution and the effect on the receiver perlocution. I will refer to these ideas throughout my study to keep track of these two interrelated aspects—assertion and acceptance—within Byron’s memorial ecology. Each voice speaking or responding to Byron’s legacy, each voice that adds to the memorial ecology, is attached to a being, space, or body. Judith Butler asserts that performative statements necessarily take place in bodies and rely on forceful enactment in physical space to mean fully—an idea that supports the ecology model of cultural memory (Excitable Speech 39). However, the effect or action of a performative depends upon more than its expression.

The force of Byron’s speech, or his written speech in poetry, demands uptake from posterity in which later individuals and communities recognize and respond to his poetic legacy. Audience agency, though distinguishable from authorial agency, is key to memorials. Thinking about the canonized, literary dead more broadly, we often perceive an implicit appeal toward present and living people to remember them and their work appropriately, to perpetuate such memories across communities, and to dedicate spaces to them. Similarly, environmental spaces, especially those cultivated by humans for residence, interact regularly with the sun, animals, insects, and humans. Such material reliance points toward a dependence on humans and non-humans that interact with or ignore a place. Authorial legacy and literary value anticipate responsible uptake from posterity to retain their influence; otherwise, writers’ attempts at memorial poems can fall flat and seem presumptuous in their attempts at immortality.
When he reached for great poetic influence, Byron commandeered nonhuman beings like trees, dogs, and land—effectively crafting an ecology in which more environmental actors functioned in harmony to perpetuate his memory. Without these nonhuman actors supporting Byron’s legacy by offering pilgrimage sites, relics, and space for legend as well as history, Byron’s memorial work would have no physical place to inhabit—no body to lend it influence. His memory could arguably persist in the minds of literary posterity, but as Lucy Newlyn and Paul Westover note, the materials of the past consolidate writerly authority and anchor some of literary influence in space (Newlyn 48, Westover 4). In essence, the materiality attached to memorial empowers the memory beyond what literary texts do on their own by making memory tangible. Since environmental materiality and agency has such an influential role in empowering literary memorials, nonhuman beings like plants and animals should be studied more carefully in their interaction with Romantic reception and literary legacy-building. Such attention could help explain why, among other things, some authors occupy more memorial space than others, why materiality is so hard for literary enthusiasts to separate from fiction, and why certain memorials persist.

“On Leaving Newstead Abbey” (1803)

“On Leaving Newstead Abbey,” published in Hours of Idleness in 1807, is a poetic mediation between Byron’s writerly legacy, the legacy of lordship he took up, unexpectedly, at a young age, and the grounds of Newstead. In mediating his identity as it tied to both ancestral legacy and land, Byron clarified the environmental agency involved in his celebrity. He wrote “On Leaving Newstead Abbey” in 1803, two years after he had started attending school away from the estate at Harrow-on-the-Hill, and at a time when he was likely missing home. For most
of his childhood, Byron (named George Gordon) lived with his mother in Scotland, poor and struggling to recover from his father’s excessive debts. After a series of unexpected circumstances, the Newstead estate and title of Lord Byron fell upon the young man, then aged ten, in 1798. Byron was able to live on the property, run-down and ruinous as it was, until 1801 when he left for school, and the property was leased out to assuage the family’s debts. Though he did not live at Newstead for long, Byron maintained his connection to it and its previous inhabitants. Throughout the poem, Byron negotiates with his family’s legacy and, proleptically, his own. Byron addresses Newstead as a being worthy of honor and interaction—a rhetorical choice that can reinforce, or at least support, our reading of Newstead the place as an environmental actor on Byron’s legacy. From the poem’s beginning, we know that Newstead is “gone to decay,” and we hear “the hollow winds whistle” through the building in ghostly fashion (“On Leaving” lines 1–2). Already Newstead functions almost as a corpse: a once-lively object now detached from spirit and, in the absence of a resident Byron, its animating personality. There is no Byronic heir to inspire the home if Byron pursues a distant education or decides to travel abroad. Having already departed for school, and having been away for a short time, the poet mourns that “In [Newstead’s] once smiling garden, the hemlock and thistle / Have choak’d up the rose, which late bloom’d in the way” (lines 3–4). Newstead appears to thrive only in accordance with the presence of a Lord Byron, and decay or turn hostile without it—blurring the lines between human and nonhuman agencies. Roses, symbolic of royalty and the nobility, turn to thistles and poisonous hemlock. Reduced to conventional images or not, the environment has a voice in this poem, recognizes when its lords are absent, and reacts accordingly. (Indeed, the pathetic fallacy, which colors this elegy and so many others, can be understood as a merger of the rhetorical, the metaphysical, and the ecological.) The roses bloomed for Byron’s ancestors,
but with the estate being leased or sold to those outside the family, its natural flora are adapting (lines 3–4).

Still, even as the estate seems corpse-like and deteriorating, Newstead retains what Jane Bennett would call “thing-power”—a kind of agency exerted by nonhuman beings or systems (Bennett 2). In her book *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*, Bennett addresses non-human influences and attempts to “give voice to a thing-power” to “highlight the active role of *nonhuman* materials in public life” (“Force” 2). The literary dead, as far as they exist in translated bodies of buildings, books, trees, or belongings, are examples of non- or more-than-human materials having an active role in human life. These converted bodies straddle our normal categories of things and persons, objects and subjects, but however one thinks of them, they continue to exert influence. Rather than understanding Newstead merely as a passive thing or memorial, we should acknowledge that it takes on a liveliness and an “actant” quality that in turn “affect[s] other bodies, enhancing or weakening their power” (“Force” 3).

In effect, Newstead extends the memory, and in a memorial sense, the lives of its human inhabitants by continuing to exist. Byron remembers his ancestors in the poem as he simultaneously presents Newstead’s relative stasis. This move reinforces both Newstead’s staying power and its residents’ limited lifespans. Byron lists out inhabitants of the Abbey, related to his family and not: monks who sang when the Abbey was a religious building, notable Byron ancestors, and historic figures relevant to England’s famed conflicts. Almost every historic figure mentioned (“mail-cover’d Barons,” “old Robert,” “John of Horistan,” etc.) is paired with a nonhuman object or place that outlasts him (lines 5, 9, 11). To be sure, one can understand Byron’s gestures in terms of simple metonymy: instead of the people themselves, he presents readers with “escutcheon and shield” (described as “sad vestiges”), “the valley of
Cressy,” “Europe,” “Palestine,” ruins of “Askalon,” and the “seat of . . . ancestors” (lines 5–11, 13, 22). The point is, though, that the people can’t be understood or even recalled in imagination without the assistance of these objects, recorded deeds, and places. And this fact helps us see how Byron infuses Newstead itself with significance and memorial agency. The combination of human and nonhuman things or beings in Byron’s bid for remembrance (illustrated not only by this poem, but also by the others) suggest that Byron understood and relied upon memorial ecologies as such. If we understand Newstead as an actant, or thing (or rather a collection of things and unifying principle for their action) exerting power per Bennett’s definition, we can find further value in her statement that “an actant never really acts alone. Its efficacy or agency always depends on the collaboration, cooperation, or interactive interference of many bodies and forces” (Bennett 20). Bennett corroborates Haraway and Butler’s work by implying that memorial ecosystems (and, I would add performative ecosystems) precariously depend upon community to mean fully (“Gender Politics” 65).

Building on these ideas, I find that environmental humanist Timothy Morton’s theorization of hyperobjects can illuminate how Newstead, as part-ruin, environment, and memorial, relies on a community of meaning that often transcends the bounds of a normal human lifespan. In general, hyperobjects are objects, but are sometimes processes, that exceed human understanding in language, time, etc. They outlast by a long shot any human development and test the limits of human conception; examples of hyperobjects include the Earth, other planets, fossils, or global warming. They make human weakness, smallness, and fragility visible—something trees and particular landscapes do as well, even if they are not as long-lived as the Earth. Byron capitalizes on this ability of landscape to minimize human influence and assert historical longevity past such influence; what each of his ancestors, and ultimately, what Byron
himself will have done, is merely a drop in the bucket of the place’s history. Instead of living, acting beings perpetually influencing Newstead, humans like Byron and his ancestors, with their agendas and personalities, become “sad vestiges” while the land perpetuates and interacts with posterity (line 8). Morton explains further that “Because they so massively outscale us, hyperobjects have magnified this weirdness of things for our inspection: things are themselves, but we can’t point to them directly” (12). And yet, humans can sometimes affect them, if only in small, incremental ways. In this case, a landscape that Byron or a memorialist alters could be set on a course of change that transcends a human lifespan. A relatively small change—a seed, a sapling, a clearing—at the time of alteration later could become visible as a full-fledged oak, forest, or environment affecting the experience of future life. memorial work, because it deals in hyperobjects, requires an effort at foresight, an imaginative engagement with the now-invisible. And yet, because the outcomes of such work remain dependent on many actors (on perlocutionary uptake), the ultimate results are hard to predict, open to all sorts of contingency.

Similarly, a writer’s reputation might be nonexistent during his or her lifetime, yet change drastically after death or recovery by a future audience. As Ann Rigney and Tom Mole emphasize in their reception studies, a writer’s work might be remediated into something new and quite different (Rigney 51; Mole, What the Victorians, 10). Indeed, such remediation, even if it distorts a literary work, may be the precondition of its being remembered at all. From a modern standpoint, it would be difficult to assess recently published literature without calling into mind the media histories influencing it and its reception, just as it would be difficult to study a sequoia without acknowledging its ecological situation and its growth. While influence and growth are tricky to measure in retrospect, their reality requires us to attend to transtemporal ecologies in addition to the transspecies ecologies at work in memorialization. Morton’s emphasis on a larger
time scale for hyperobjects adds context to Rigney’s and Mole’s work in terms of what a transtemporal memorial ecology looks like—one in which, across time, many actors play a part without being able to comprehend or conceive of the unfolding whole.

Byron’s Newstead persists across time as a quasi-hyperobject in that it extends beyond human lifespans, and exercises nonhuman agency, moves that support the memory of its inhabitants. Newstead’s environment lasts longer than any of its human or animal inhabitants, yet still retains spaces that people associate with Byron and his family. Byron might take comfort in this idea, yet he mourns his departure and loss of Newstead as his primary residence. A “tear dim[s] his eye, at this sad separation,” and he carries this mourning through his future travels, though “Far distant he goes” (lines 25, 27). While he did not spend many years there, Newstead is a concentration point for many desires and memorial forces. It provides place not only for roses or thistles, but for the legacy of his ancestors and, he hopes, for his own. As mentioned previously, Byron calls some ancestors by name (“John of Horistan,” “Paul,” “Hubert,”), others he refers to as “mail-cover’d Barons,” and “shades of heroes,” and others he addresses as “you”—“How you fought! how you died!” (“On Leaving” lines 5, 11, 13, 15–16). “Four brothers,” Byron writes, “enrich’d, with their blood, the bleak field; / For the rights of a monarch, their country defending, / Till death their attachment to royalty seal’d” (lines 18–20). These iterations of ancestors evoke war and chivalry among other things like music, proving perhaps that, since he is the heir apparent to these ancestors’ home, Byron has also inherited their noble qualities and talents. The blood spilt for king and country waters the earth—aligning the ancestors’ noble wills with historic and future plants needing nourishment. This mention of blood, too, links the present Byron to his ancestors, and emphasizes the noble death that immortalized their memory. As a conclusion, he presages his own death by saying in the third
person that “Like you will he live, or like you will he perish; / When decay’d, may he mingle his
dust with your own” (lines 31–32). As in some of the other poems, as we shall see, Byron speaks
into his legacy an imaginary or quasi-real burial site. He links his future corpse to those now
inseparable (whether in reality or legacy) from the grounds of Newstead. All the “mingled” dust
will fertilize the ground, giving nourishment to and interacting with the ecological and memorial
community. Here the material requisites for environmental life, like effective assertions of fame,
depend on multispecies community and cooperation. The history of Newstead sustains its
grounds, and vice versa.

“To an Oak in the Garden of Newstead Abbey” (composed 1807, published 1832)

In “To an Oak in the Garden of Newstead Abbey,” Byron gives voice to an oak tree on
the property and imbues plant life with the ability to perpetuate his legacy. Focusing on one
specific nonhuman being in the poem fulfills multiple roles. First, the poem illustrates the
material requirements for one tree, rather than the grounds as a general ecology, to live. It
identifies a part of the Newstead ecology that can expand to represent the whole. Second, the
focus in the poem on a tree builds Byron’s writerly legacy and highlights his connection to this
specific tree. Drawing implicitly on the recognizable literary and genealogical tropes of trees
representing (respectively) authorial legacy and aristocratic background—Byron intentionally
builds a legacy for himself. Shakespeare had his mulberry, Pope had his willow, and both trees
were treated as pilgrimage sites as well as physical manifestations of the author with which they
were associated. Byron planted the tree shortly after inheriting Newstead, then left the estate to
attend school while it was rented by others and wrote it into a legend via the poem. Almost from
the moment Byron addresses the oak, he expresses guilt for its neglect—suggesting that the
tree’s survival depends on beings outside of it. Although he planted the tree, wished its days to be long and, for a time, “rear’d [it] with pride,” Byron had to leave Newstead in adolescence and found his oak decaying upon his return (lines 2, 6). It seems to be Byron’s responsibility to grant a “little care” to “revive [its] young head, and [its] wounds gently heal,” since the stranger overseeing it left it to wither (12–13). Here, the tree exerts natural, material relationships in requiring Byron’s specific care. During his schooling, Byron was unable to meet the material needs of the oak, which endangered the tree’s life—a shortcoming he addresses in the poem. The “stranger [who] has dwelt in the hall of [Byron’s] sire” only showed the oak “neglect” and almost “bade [it] expire” (10, 12). The dependent relationship between Byron and his oak hints at another relationship requiring both appeal and response—that which exists between a deceased author and his or her living audience. Should posterity fail to memorialize a dead writer, the writer’s work may disappear from cultural consciousness, the canon, or even from history. Contemporaries may offer judgments about an author’s importance, but these ideas have power only when other people, years or generations later, embrace those judgments as true or real, or at least continue to argue about them. Texts and authors weather tests of time, in short, by finding new readers who take them up in fruitful ways. Some writers, like Byron and other Romantics, were both prescient of and influential on their postmortem canonization and literary immortality. They wrote with future readers in mind. Still, whoever appeals to posterity necessarily relies on them to take up their request(s).

In this poem, Byron is (for the moment) the only person capable of reviving his oak. Only through his “water[ing the tree’s] stem with [his] tears” can the oak “droop not” and have its “branches their beauty display” (7, 19, 24). Byron’s physical body and its emotive secretions symbolically sustain and infuse into the oak—translating the materiality of Byron, as well as his
sympathies, into portions of a tree. In imagining this kind of symbiosis between him and the oak, makes the concept of biological survival literal, yet he also has symbolic afterlife in mind. As noted earlier, Byron implicitly inserts himself in a literary tradition associated with canonized writers like Shakespeare, Milton, and Pope. He extends his life beyond a normal human span by linking himself to literary “immortals” and to a more-than-human physical being. And even as he promotes his memory’s persistence in a living form, he gives thoughts to his death. “For centuries,” Byron asserts, “still may thy boughs lightly wave / O’er the corse of thy Lord in thy canopy laid; / While the branches thus gratefully shelter his grave” (29–31). Once again, Byron makes an imaginary burial site part of the Newstead ecology.² He dedicates his own grave, so to speak, and even though Byron did not end up being buried beneath this tree, it served in future years as a kind of symbolic gravesite in that literary posterity and others often made pilgrimage to it (and even to its stump after it perished).³

Byron closes the oak poem by requesting that posterity reverence him, imagining a man who will tell others “in whispers more softly to tread,” to be respectful, above where Byron’s body lies at rest (34). Crucial to this prophesied audience response, however, will be the persistence of memory and interaction with other human and nonhuman beings. Byron exclaims: “Oh! surely, by these [future pilgrims] I shall ne’er be forgot; / [as long as] Remembrance still hallows the dust of the dead” (35–36). In these lines, Byron appears to transfer the responsibility

² Upon Byron’s passing away in Greece in 1824, John Hobhouse accompanied Byron’s remains to England via boat. After a small viewing of the body, and some discussion of interring the poet at Westminster Abbey, Hobhouse acquiesced to Mrs. Augusta Leigh’s wish that her brother be buried in the family vault near Newstead at Hucknall Torkard Church.

³ Sophia Hawthorne (whose husband was American author Nathaniel Hawthorne), among others, made the pilgrimage to “the storied oak planted by Byron” and recorded her experience, enriching the memorial ecology and affirming Byron’s performative language surrounding the oak (Hawthorne 102). In their published travel journals, Benjamin Moran, Andrew McFarland, Sophia Hawthorne, William Wells Brown, and many others recorded visits to the Newstead and their attempted gathering of mementos from the oak tree. (See, respectively, The Footpath and Highway: or, Wanderings of an American in Great Britain in 1851 and ’52; The Escape, or, Loiterings amid the Scenes of Song and Story; Notes in England and Italy; and Sketches of Places and People Abroad).
of caring for the oak to his literary posterity and construct a system that will continue to perform remembrance and nourish Byron’s legacy after his death. Without the active participation of other beings—human and not—in his memorial, Byron cannot achieve the literary immortality he and other Romantic writers suggest that they long for.

Like books, literary trees⁴ rely on posterity, or living agents who participate in the uptake of an author’s legacy. They function as metaphysical translations of the author’s body—whether literally borrowing from the author’s decaying body for nutrients, standing as living witnesses where authors once stood, or representing an author’s long-reaching influence through seeds, cuttings, and transplantations. When taken up by literary enthusiasts or descendants, they can represent a performance of belonging in a lineage, genealogy, culture, etc. In Heather Jackson’s words, “Books are sustained by the interest of readers. Every reading is a sort of performance, a small act of revival, and no book is quite ‘dead’ until nobody ever reads it. Any reader or group of readers has potentially the ability, depending on their means of publicity, to renew public interest in a work that had been disregarded” (Jackson 224). Sustaining literature, whether by speaking of it or caring for it, falls to literature’s varied audiences—a theme Romantic poets refer to frequently in their work. Judith Butler puts forth a similar idea when she argues that language and uptake create the social existence, or significance, of a body (Excitable Speech 5). If literary posterity, for example, absorbs the performative language of memorializing dead authors, they enact their belonging in a literary community. If nonreaders do the same, they might be attaching cultural capital to themselves. “To an Oak” performs the intent of Lord Byron to be remembered, to be revived by posterity even as he revived his oak with sustaining

---

⁴ In addition to his work on literary tourism, Paul Westover has presented and written on literary trees, like Byron’s oak. I am grateful for permission to read his unpublished “Touchwood Trees: Literary Relics and Arboreal Tourism in the Age of Authors.”
affection. All the promised memorial and postmortem glory in the poem, however, hinges on one word in line 25, an “if” that depends on future reception to enact Byron’s proposed reality. “If [emphasis added] Maturity’s years” favor the oak, if posterity can care for it as Byron claimed to rather than the neglectful “stranger” did, then Byron’s memory as it relates to this tree can persist, and “Remembrance [will still hallow] the dust of the dead” (25, 10, 36). Memory requires action from the living and the dead, not necessarily at the same time, but for the same purpose, to preserve the literary canon and community.

In a self-conscious manner representative of his generation, Byron builds his own legacy through an oak tree rather than leave posterity to draw a connection for him like they did for some earlier writers (e.g., between Shakespeare and his mulberry, or Pope and his willow). He acknowledges that the writer-audience relationship—or, to put it another way, the dead writer-posterity relationship—is a push and pull of memorial agency between communities separated and regulated by time, space, and circumstance. Furthermore, he understands these communities to be mutually constitutive: neither can fully take shape without the performance of the other. Paul Westover addresses these ideas in Necromanticism, a text that informs my analysis of Byron’s memorial environments in many ways. I depart from his work in my treatment of these spaces, especially Byron’s oak and ancestral home as they are imagined in his poetry, as having what environmental humanists would call more-than-human agency and exercising performative language accordingly. In this respect, the hope Byron pins on the oak for preserving his legacy exemplifies Ursula Heise’s idea of eco-cosmopolitanism, which she defines as an “attempt to envision individuals and groups as part of planetary ‘imagined communities’ of both human and nonhuman kinds” (61). J. A. Hubbell builds on Heise’s work when he argues that a cultural, urban environmental vein has always existed in Romanticism, an “interpenetration of culture and
nature” that shows the bidirectional influence between humanity and nature in a very different way from the rural, localist work that Wordsworth, for instance, espoused (5). Byron’s legacy-building work depends on multispecies relationships and cooperation. Now, with a general sense of Newstead as place and individual sense of the oak tree, we can read the following poems as additions to Byron’s memorial ecology—musings that not only display environmental agency in memorial work, but that emphasize the unification of multispecies agencies in service of said work.

“Elegy on Newstead Abbey” (1807)

“Elegy on Newstead Abbey” is a similar poem to “On Leaving Newstead” in that it highlights the different voices or agencies that have built the environment and fits the latest Lord Byron’s legacy into a longer history. It extends Newstead’s legacy into the past and, thereby, validates and builds up Byron’s historical import. Byron claims to have added the work to Hours of Idleness “at the particular request of some friends” (Hours of Idleness 137). The Abbey’s history as a religious building commissioned by Henry II lends it a spiritual significance and authority that lingers in its gothic architecture and hallowed ground and which alters the interpretation of its materiality. In very similar fashion to “Leaving Newstead,” “Elegy” begins with the ruined portion of the estate. The poem’s speaker imagines “pensive shades” haunting the site, linking Byron to his forbearers as in a transtemporal family together with monks, soldiers, and nobility (“Elegy” line 4). The citation and commendation of British history forms another part of the memorial ecology that lends credibility to Byron’s character and enriches the environment of the Abbey itself. Still, even as Byron illustrates how historical, ancestral agency affected the Abbey, he establishes a hierarchy in which nature supersedes human activity. For
instance, even as he notes how “sacred fathers. . . raised their pious voices but to pray,” how the “blood of traitors smear[ed] the purple plain,” “victims wallow[ed] on the gory ground” in lawless times, and “Charles’ protecting genius” came to his predecessors’ aid, he shows how each of these groups of people were left as ruinous as the building (lines 31–32, 66, 80, 71). Despite humans’ heroic actions or notable historical moments, ultimately the Abbey became a place where “bats their wavering wings extend,” “ill omen’d birds resort,” “rank and sighing weeds” grow upon human graves, and, ultimately, “Nature triumphs” (33, 99, 85, 104).

Contrary to a struggling lord’s probable logic, Byron prizes the dilapidated Abbey over more well-kept estates: “Hail! To thy pile! More honour’d in thy fall, / Than modern mansions, in their pillar’d state; / Proudly majestic frowns thy vaulted hall, / Scowling defiance on the blasts of fate” (5-8). In celebrating ruin, devastation, and endurance through time, Byron rejects some modern attempts at architectural legacy-building. The most pointed of these remarks is when Byron disparages the “gilded domes, / Or gewgaw grottos, of the vainly great”—emphasizing the ruinous superiority of Newstead to, for instance, Alexander Pope’s fashionable grotto-turned-tourist attraction (148-49). The hierarchy in this poem privileges ruins over polished marble, and this privileging of environmental over human agency was perhaps also a move to ameliorate Byron’s anxieties over his performance as a lord, or his anxiety that he might not be remembered as a man or a poet. If Byron’s performance could rely on other beings outside of himself for its success, his influence, even with its supposed shortcomings, would have been enough. Byron furthers this argument by noting that time inevitably consumes human accomplishment by noting that “Years roll on years; to ages, ages yield” (37). To enhance his human accomplishments, he aims to preserve himself in Newstead and, by extension, in its surrounding grounds, plant, and animal life (37).
Donna Haraway addresses such intersections in her book *When Species Meet*, where she argues that “To be one is always to become with many” (4). Byron asserts a memorial and spiritual connection to multiple places and beings. He uses performative language and memory work in his favor and cites Newstead as one community that perpetuates his postmortem influence. At the close of “Elegy,” Byron “lingers mid [Newstead’s] damp and mossy tombs, / Nor breathes a murmur ‘gainst the will of fate” (lines 150–51). Fate functions here as an inevitable yielding of the human to the more-than-human, the environmental. At the same moment he recognizes the limited scope of human time, Byron “lingers” in the ruin, and thereby in the expanded environmental timeframe—a move which dissolves his life and legacy into Newstead, preserving it for the future (line 150). Instead of maintaining an identity separate from his ancestral environment, Byron assimilates into it, crafting a multispecies ecology that supports, with unified multispecies agencies, his legacy.

“Inscription on the Monument of a Newfoundland Dog” (1808)

In his 1808 poem “Inscription on the Monument of a Newfoundland Dog,” the blurring of the lines between human and nonhuman agency intensifies, until the poem, the monument, and the memory of Byron’s dog appear to be acting in unison. In addition to plant life at Newstead, Byron links himself to domesticated animal life. Specifically, he connects his legacy to the memory of his dog Boatswain who, though not native to Newstead, called it home and died there. According to Washington Irving, who published a famous account of his visit to Newstead in 1835, Boatswain’s descendant living at the property—the dog Lyon, said to have accompanied Byron’s remains from Greece, and now cared for by the chamberlain of the Abbey—was beloved by all visitors (63). This big, “generous” dog represented a living link to
the poet. However, Byron’s poem (not to mention the monument for which it was destined) offered a different sort of memorial logic and highlighted the value that a natural, organic relic could impart to a manmade one. The poem presents animal life as deserving of a memorial, and, to an extent criticizes the supposed superiority of humans. The poem’s speaker notes, satirically, that when a man dies, “The sculptor’s art exhausts the pomp of woe, / And storied urns record who rests below,” with the tomb describing “Not what he was, but what he should have been” (“Inscription” lines 3–6). On the other hand, the “poor dog, in life the firmest friend” lacks proper dignity in death, though more worthy of praise than most men (7). The dog is “Denied in heaven the soul he held on earth” because man “claims himself a sole exclusive heaven” (12, 14). Rather than excluding nonhuman life from his postmortem existence, Byron seeks unification with it. As a human, a “degraded mass of animated dust,” he connections to place, plants, and his dog’s memorial so that his dust will mean (18).

Byron includes some elements in the poem that suggest the superiority of humans, or at least the predominance of human agency, in memorial ecology. He pushes against this hierarchy though, in interesting ways. Humans are described as unworthy, and as “vain insect[s]”—communicating that some animal life is perhaps less deserving of praise (13). The dog has an “honest heart,” and profound loyalty to its master; it “labours, fights, lives, breathes for him alone” (9-10). The dog’s agency only exists to support its master’s—a move that is, at the least, problematic when we attempt to understand nonhuman life. In death, the animal can only be redeemed from an “unhonoured” and “unnoticed” status by human recognition, by its master erecting “stones” and a “simple urn” for it (11, 23, 25). Human traditions mean little in the natural world, yet Byron seems to be combining them for his own memorial purposes. If we extend what we understand from the description of his dog, we can infer that Byron likely saw
other kinds of nonhuman life as poetic material to enhance his legacy. As Byron unites himself with Newstead—its land, life, and legacy—he seems to subjugate it for his own memorial and poetic purposes, enacting an anthropocentric worldview on it and negating its agency, or thing-power. If, however, we see Newstead as a translated, postmortem author-body for Byron, and we take Byron’s poetic animation of Newstead at face value, we can acknowledge that the different agencies lending life to Byron’s memory all construct the whole of his memorial ecology.

The poem is carved onto Boatswain’s tomb on the property at Newstead, an imposing monument larger than Byron’s eventual one. The tomb is a massive stone memorial, with an urn depicted above the poem, and a crypt below the structure where Byron intended to be buried himself, alongside Boatswain, Augusta Leigh, and his manservant Joe Murray—his truest friends and allies. Here again, Byron imagines his death and interment, expecting his grave to be a key feature of the future memorial ecology. It is noteworthy, though, that he considers Boatswain a fitting companion in death, arguably also the equal of the heroic dead buried elsewhere on the property. The injunction Byron writes at the end of the poem suggests a loyalty to Boatswain that no one else can have, but that it is published and visible suggests that others can take up and participate in remembering Boatswain: “Pass on—it honours none you wish to mourn: / To mark a friend’s remains these stones arise, / I never knew but one, and here he lies” (lines 24–26). That Byron assumes no one will wish to mourn Boatswain without his inscribed poem reemphasizes his legacy-building project: first, to connect the plants and animals and space at Newstead to his own legacy, and second, to inspire audiences to care for his legacy via Newstead, its plants, and

---

5 In the 1811 draft of his will, Byron expressed his wish to be buried with Boatswain on the Newstead property, among others. During his lifetime, though, Murray (who was to share Byron’s and Boatswain’s grave) doubted Byron’s intent: “if I was sure his lordship would come here [to be buried] I should like it well enough, but I should not like to lie alone with the dog” (Moore and Byron 131). As it turned out, Murray’s fears were well justified. In 1824, Newstead’s new owners denied a request to inter Byron on the property, so the poet’s remains ended up a few miles away in the Church of Saint Mary Magdalene, Hucknall.
animals. The assertion of his own connection to Boatswain suggests that Byron loved his dog, obviously, but also that he had a meaningful, unique connection to nonhuman life that sometimes trumped his human relationships. That the monument is larger than Byron’s own eventual grave, and on the Newstead property, continues what Byron writes in the poem and draws unusual, elegiac attention to nonhuman life. As noted above, Washington Irving reported that Boatswain’s descendants, or at least dogs that were of the same breed, resided at the Abbey for years after the poet’s death and provided yet another avenue for tourists to interact with Byron’s legacy (Irving 70). Some tourists collected plant cuttings from the site of Boatswain’s grave, not to mention images of Boatswain’s monument. It seems that this poem, like the others in this collection, relied on audience interaction to mean fully. It also required remediation. As Tom Mole puts it, the “intermedial” web of reception works through forms “both ‘old’ and ‘new,’” and that is one reason why “it requires us to think in terms of a media ecology” (3). Byron’s poems press us to adopt a rather broad definition of media—one that includes buildings and trees and even dogs as well as texts, pictures, souvenirs and the like. Without the combined work of Boatswain’s memory, his descendants, the space and stone on Newstead’s grounds, and the pilgrimage of literary tourists, Byron’s tribute to his nonhuman friend would lack the import it maintains today.

Newstead’s Legacy

Two years after writing “Elegy” but nine years before selling the Abbey, Byron wrote to his mother, “Come what may, Newstead and I stand or fall together. I have now lived on the spot, I have fixed my heart upon it, and no pressure, present or future, shall induce me to barter the last vestige of our inheritance” (Moore, 1:163 [Letter XXXII, 6 March 1809]). Obviously, he found himself unable to hold to that early resolve. Still, despite Byron’s later sale of the Abbey,
he wrote himself into the ancestral home via his poetry and physical markings and relied on imaginative communion with nonhuman life. This intentional marking and claiming of the ecologies at Newstead has been recognized and taken up by Byron’s literary posterity. John Beckett and Shelia Aley, among others, address Newstead as literary pilgrimage site and note that “The number of visitors to Newstead increased partly out of respect for Byron and partly because his death coincided with a growing interest in country-house visiting” (292). Here, too, it seems that a memorial ecology of intersecting agencies worked in Byron’s favor. Newstead did not ask Byron to memorialize himself with it, but Byron did, became famous, and changed the landscape’s ecology. Even now, pilgrims and preservationists prize aspects of the property—the stump of the oak tree mentioned in the poem, dead for some years, remains there on stilts and has a daughter tree planted nearby to perpetuate the seed; Boatswain’s monument is a popular location at the property; and the house itself is open every day of the week for tours. Part of a tree (now deceased, but like the oak once commonly visited by tourists) into which Byron and Augusta carved their names, is displayed inside the house and therefore speaks beyond its natural lifespan. Byron claimed that he would endure via memory when people visited Newstead—“Remembrance …[would hallow] the dust of the dead”—and he was right (“To an Oak” line 36). In other words, he asserted that because of the memory ecology he initiated, he would live on with Newstead’s land, its animals, its trees, its stone.

Byron was not alone in this assertion; numerous visitors throughout history, during his life and after, imagined or felt the influence of the poet at the Abbey. An early instance of memorial uptake occurred when Colonel Wildman thought to cut down Byron’s oak, not yet knowing the story behind it. According to Thomas Moore, Wildman said to a servant, “‘Here is a fine young oak; but it must be cut down, as it grows in an improper place.’—‘I hope not, sir,’
replied the man, ‘for it’s the one that my lord was so fond of, because he set it himself’” (Moore 1:50). This anecdote was reproduced as a footnote in John Murray’s definitive posthumous edition of Byron’s poems (1830), and it accompanied the poem in any number of editions thereafter, becoming a permanent feature of the reception record. Whether this exchange between Wildman and his servant occurred or not, it shows a promotion of the oak tree in question as “Byron’s Oak.” Byron, in planting the oak and caring for it, and “cherish[ing] the fancy, that as the tree flourished so should he,” put himself into it (Moore 1:50). Sophia Hawthorne, in her account, wrote that the oak was “trimmed bare, far out of reach of human hands; and when I asked the gardener for some leaves, he exclaimed ‘Oh, I daren’t.’ He was forbidden to touch it” (102). In 1857, even after Byron was buried elsewhere, the oak was treated with a kind of memorial reverence—untouchable for tourists and caretakers alike—resting in peace, so to speak.

Washington Irving also took up Byron’s self-asserted presence at the Abbey. Although he noted the historical context in which Newstead existed—as “one of the finest specimens in existence of those quaint and romantic piles”—his primary focus is on the latest Lord Byron, and the property’s associations with him (Irving 55, 65). As Irving was a writer himself (and one who would make himself famous in part by building a house to serve as his monument), this focus appears related to what Alison Booth meant when she said that “Pilgrimage to authors’ shrines gathered signatures, in a way, to put different writers and locales on the ballot initiative to alter literary histories” (8). Irving praised “the reverential care with which…[Colonel Wildman] has preserved and renovated every monument and relic of the Byron family, and every object in anywise connected with the memory of the poet” (61)—and, he might have added, how Colonel Wildman and his wife Louisa managed and preserved the guest-book. In praising Wildman’s use
of agency and funds to preserve Byron’s memory, and interacting with the property, Irving aligns himself with Byron supporters and capitalizes on a relationship, however distant, to the famed poet. It’s interesting to note that Irving’s account was published by John Murray around the same time that Murray published the collected works of Byron (a decade after Byron’s death), and could have been intended to boost sales of the collected works and perpetuate Byromania beyond Byron’s grave. This posthumous boom of popularity shows that the validation of Byron’s legacy, historically and presently, includes business ventures as well as devoted readers and aspiring writers. But Irving merely provides a template for future pilgrims’ itineraries.

For nearly two centuries now, pilgrims have taken up Byron’s poetic injunctions to remember him and recorded their experiences at Newstead via guidebooks, blogs, social media, and more. Every example I have found makes references to Byron in some form—usually, however, discussing how a combination of actors (the house, the artifacts, the trees, the monuments) makes the poet’s memory tangible and focused. In short, literary tourism has embraced not just Byron himself, but the memorial ecology surrounding him. Ultimately, and in large part due to nonhuman actors, it seems that Byron’s constructed legacy at Newstead is doing the work he hoped it would when he wrote these four early poems. Mario Ortiz Robles and Shoshana Feldman shed more light on the performative portion of Byron’s memorial ecology: according to both scholars, a successful performative effectively means that a statement is closed—that there’s nothing more to say. Byron exerted force on his audience through poetry about Newstead. His contemporaries, posterity, and the environment at Newstead took up that claim that Newstead was his, and made it so, or at least supported the claim by providing space for literary tourists and housing memorializing expressions. Arguably, these beings were more likely to exercise their agency in Byron’s favor because his performance was incomplete. Part of
the performative utterance is performance itself, and to some extent Byron, whether as poet, lord, or person, failed to perform fully his prescribed roles. Because of his failure to maintain Newstead, live long enough to finish *Don Juan*, or have high moral standards (mostly according to Victorian audiences), for instance, Byron left openings for others to enter and perform the work he could not. According to Beckett and Aley, many Victorians “preferred to love the poetry and hate, or even ignore, the man” (17); and yet, “Byron has effectively been absolved from responsibility for what happened [financial collapse] at Newstead,” and the person of Byron (along with favorite passages of his verse) continued to inspire fascination throughout the nineteenth century and beyond, even if only as a symbol of excess or a cautionary tale (296). Karen Swann offers the following regarding Coleridge, Shelley, and Keats, but which applies to Byron as well since his life, too, was cut short:

> The glamor that colors the afterlives of all three poets is bound to the stories they and others tell of promise wasted or prematurely cut off, either to be forever unfulfilled or, at best, to be belatedly redeemed by a future they shaped but did not live to see….Each of these lives…seems to speak to another sort of failed promise, now on the part of a culture that has abrogated its end of a deal in which something might be owed to art. (2)

This idea that something “might be owed to art” further confirms that Byron’s legacy involves a bidirectional relationship between Byron and his audiences. Since Byron himself can no longer speak as a living human, posterity and the environment at Newstead that take up his memory can ventriloquize him to some extent and include themselves in his legacy. In other words, pilgrims to Newstead rely on Byron’s legacy and interaction with environmental actors to give themselves place in literary posterity. Alison Booth expands on this idea when she observes that “The ambiguous metaphors of hospitality and reception point to a structured social exchange between
host and guest” (1). Newstead, including its many nonhuman actors, allows visitors to imagine that, when they visit, Byron is their host. Without Byron’s memorial crafting of Newstead, its recruited environmental agency perpetuating the place, its effective hosting of future literary pilgrims, and uptake from enthusiasts touched by Byromania, visitors would have little reason to visit the property and accrue its associated cultural capital. Byron’s legacy is a give and take between what he left behind, the places and things that grew and grow where he did, and his transtemporal audience.

Living authors, in Byron’s time and ours, can find it difficult to canonize themselves, since all the “greats” seem to be dead or considered dead before they are valorized. It also seems likely that the literary dead need to have monuments in their honor (homes, graves, trees, memorial tablets, or other structures) in order to be taken up by posterity. Ann Rigney, in her assessment of Walter Scott’s memory, suggests that it was “Scott’s procreativity: the ability of his works to generate new versions of itself in other people’s acts of productive remembrance,” that created for him an enormous cultural presence for more than a century (50). Tom Mole addresses remediation of the deceased when he emphasizes that immortalization can only happen if one is dead, and if one’s work can be translated into some kind of material permanence taken up and revitalized by posterity (Mole 10). What Rigney and Mole might discuss further is the influence that multispecies environmental materiality had in supporting authors’ legacies. Byron was successful in this endeavor because he enlisted nonhuman actors to help him. In the words of Leslie Marchand, “There was something in Byron’s restless spirit that did continue to breathe when he expired, that moved his close associates to devotion to his memory and to contention with others, but scarcely ever to indifference” (472). That something that continues breathing is the environment at Newstead Abbey, as much as it is also Byron’s memory persisting in literary
enthusiasts. When writers are associated with and supported by trees, nature, other human bodies
or ideological symbols, they can transcend their initial human body and be reincarnated as a
quasi-hyperobject, a being beyond human time.

In thinking about the translation of an author-body from physical presence into a more
metaphysical one, materiality remains largely unavoidable. Without physical pages containing
the written word, a memory occupying space in the mind, or a memorial space such as
Newstead, an author like Byron cannot persist after death. Further, they cannot transcend the
material world and exist only metaphysically since, though the metaphysical may outweigh the
physical materiality after death, their memory still requires a body to inhabit—whether that’s the
author’s admirers, a favorite chair, a mulberry tree, or manuscripts. In this sense, memorials are a
system that refuses to be reduced to pure signification; their materiality is requisite for their
existence to mean. As Judith Butler puts it in Excitable Speech, “The ‘force’ of the speech act is,
however incongruously, related to the body whose force is deflected and conveyed through
speech” (39). A performative relationship that includes assertion and uptake needs a body to
inhabit—a physical force with the power to enact its speech.

The force that pushes literary pilgrims to honor Byron and his associated things seems
empowered only because those authors have a physical space on earth that is dedicated to them.
Byron’s influence comes from his physical taking of space—in books, trees, monuments, and not
just from his abstract cultural memory. As Butler says, “We cannot talk about a body without
knowing what supports that body, and what its relation to that support—or lack of support—
might be. In this way, the body is less an entity than a living set of relations” (“Gender Politics”
65). We cannot talk about Byron’s cultural influence without the multifaceted memorial ecology,
or voice, that supports it. His legacy is a voice that speaks to audiences, later writers and literary
canon, and it takes up space in the world—space that acts as a kind of body through which this speech takes effect. Byromania is an intersection of various agencies—that of Byron, his contemporaries, postmortem audiences, and especially features of the memorial environment he helped create. Without Newstead Abbey and its composite of environmental actors, Byron’s legacy would not exist in the way that it currently does; it relies on nonhuman actors at least as much as human ones. Still, these environmental actors, along with others involved in Romantic reception, receive little credit for their roles in memorial ecology, and deserve more analysis. This essay’s insights about nonhuman agency can also apply to lieux de mémoire associated with other authors and, indeed, to the whole memorial ecosystem that defined the reception of Romantic-era writers for decades.
Works Cited


——— “To an Oak in the Garden of Newstead Abbey, planted by the Author in the 9th Year of his age; this tree at his last visit was in a state of decay, though perhaps not irrecoverable.—15th March 1807,” *Lord Byron: The Complete Poetical Works*. Edited by Jerome McGann, vol. 1. Oxford UP, 1980, pp. 204–206.


———. “Touchwood Trees: Literary Relics and Arboreal Tourism in the Age of Authors.” *Manuscript.*