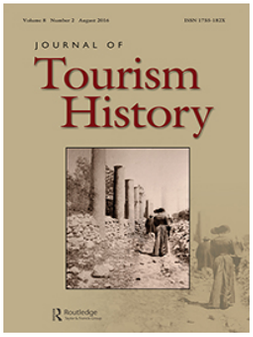

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The guestbook as historical source

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ABSTRACT

The hotel guest book, often overlooked as a source for the study of travel, can offer rich insight into literary practices and travel culture in the nineteenth century. Much valuable work has extracted nominal and geographic details for guests from these books; a more extended research programme treating the sources as a form of travel writing can highlight their utility in exploring the representation of self and landscape, as well as providing a critical framework for exploring the legal regimes within which systems of inscription and reading operated. A research agenda exploring British and Swiss books must find ways of rigorously, systematically, and comparatively engaging with books, aligning questions that interrogate the textual and material properties of manuscript and printed materials. Far from being a collection of names, a record of last resort for historians seeking a substitute for more systematic sources, or a form of ephemera, the visitors' books are tools to reconstruct tourist markets, and also records of commercial evolution, intercultural encounter, discursive practice, cultural evaluation, literary cultures, and book history.

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Describing his stop at a hotel near the summit of Montanvers, two and three-quarter hours after a departure from Chamonix and at the end of a taxing climb, the cleric William Lindsay Alexander remarked on a notable specimen of book which he encountered on his mid-nineteenth-century tour of Europe – a tour which was, he recounted, chiefly focussed on Switzerland and the religious condition of that state:

> I amused myself with the visitors' books, three volumes of which now exist, bearing the autographs of innumerable strangers from all lands. Unhappily they are in a very dilapidated condition, and most of the curious autographs have been pilfered. I was most amused with the entries of some of my own countrymen, as for instance, '– this day John –, his wife, and two daughters ascended to this place – found the riding on mules very fatiguing – but are bound to say that they feel recompensed by the stupendous scenery around them,' to which was appended the following commentary: 'Indeed! don't you think a few more trees would be rather an improvement?' Another worthy complained that he had felt rather giddy sometimes whilst riding up; upon which a succeeding visitor had courteously suggested that the next time he had better try the effect of riding with his face turned to the tail of the mule! These, and a thousand other such *bétises* are the

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> memorials by which the travelling *bourgeoisie* of Britain have chosen to perpetuate their names at a spot where, amidst the august solemnities of nature, self should have been forgotten, and folly abashed in silence.[1]

Hotel books such as the one through which this Scottish cleric and scholar leafed stand at a confluence of vigorous investigations in historical geography and contemporary applied interests in the nature of the tourist market.[2] In the absence of other sources which might illuminate the spatial dynamics of the hotel business, they extend our understanding of the places from which guests are drawn, the length of their stays, and, when possible, their subsequent destinations.[3] This is the approach to the visitors' book which is most entrenched within the academy, and which has benefitted from digital technologies such as GIS, expanding the record-sets upon which we can draw in exploring commercial hostelries, especially the small-scale variety whose fortunes were notoriously precarious.

There is another potential layer of analysis which explores the visitors' book through the prism of textual and literary scholarship. It offers the opportunity to broaden the scope of study and to incorporate rich contemporary printed material that emplotted the book within generic histories, literary appraisals, and wider evaluations of travel practices. It can also lead us to explore manuscript material that was regarded as a generic cousin of the visitors' book. Such an approach allows us to contextualise the visitors' book as an historical record, and to develop a critical perspective on its generic features, on its evolution, and on the literary and reading practices associated with it. It builds on the contributions of historical geography and examines not only where the guests came from, but, to the best we are able, what it meant to be a guest inscribing in and reading it, treating those acts as fundamentally interrelated performances. It also allows us to understand the books as products and shapers of culture, to consider how contemporaries handled them as vital cultural objects, and to compare them across time and space.

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[1]William Lindsay Alexander, *Switzerland and the Swiss Churches: Being Notes of a Short Tour, and Notices of the Principal Religious Bodies in that Country* (Glasgow: James Maclehose, 1846), 77–78.

[2]David A. Fyfe and Deryck Holdsworth, 'Signatures of Commerce in Small-town Hotel Guest Registers', *Social Science History* 33, no. 1 (2009): 17–45; David A. Fyfe, Deryck W. Holdsworth, and Chris Weaver, 'Historical GIS and Visualization', Social *Science Computer Review* 27, no. 3 (2009): 348–62; C. Weaver, D. Fyfe, A. Robinson, D. Holdsworth, D. Peuquet, and A. M. Maceachren, 'Visual Analysis of Historic Hotel Visitation Patterns', 2006 IEE Symposium on Visual Analytics Science and Technology, October 31–November 2, Baltimore, MD, 35–42; Chris Weaver, David Fyfe, Anthony Robinson, Deryck Holdsworth, Donna Peuquet, and Alan M. Maceachren. 'Visual Exploration and Analysis of Historic Hotel Visits', *Information Visualization* 6, no.1 (2007): 89–103; Keith Dewar, 'Old Hotel Registers as a Tool in Analysing Resort Visitation and Development', *Recreation Research Review* 10, no. 3 (1983): 5–10. Ian Donnachie, 'Historic Tourism to New Lanark and the Falls of Clyde, 1795–1830: The Evidence of Contemporary Visiting Books and Related Sources', *Journal of Tourism and Cultural Change* 2, no. 3 (2004): 145–63; Jan O. J. Lundgren, 'The Market Area of the Turn of the Century Hotel: The Château Frontenac in Québec City', *Recreation Research Review* 10, no. 3 (1983): 11–21; LouAnn Wurst, '"Human Accumulations": Class and Tourism at Niagara Falls', *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 15, no. 2 (2011): 254–66. For a superb survey not only of Scottish records, but of the historical value of the visitors' book as an historical source, see Alastair Durie, 'Tracking Tourism: Visitors' Books and their Value', *Scottish Archives* 17 (2011): 73–84. In addition to such specialized articles, visitors' books figure in studies such as A.K. Sandoval-Strausz, *Hotel: An American History* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), Julia Thomas, *Shakespeare's Shrine: The Bard's Birthplace and the Invention of Stratford-upon-Avon* (Philadelphia: University of Pennyslvania Press, 2012), and Alastair J. Durie, *Scotland for the Holidays: Tourism in Scotland, c. 1780–1939* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2004).

[3]Additionally, some analyses, while focussed on nominal data, offer a more qualitative appraisal, less focussed on systematic analysis; as an example, see Roland Moberg, 'What a Visitor's Book Reveals', in *Lichenologial Contributions in Honour of David Galloway*, ed. Ingvar Kärnefelt and Arne Thelll (Berlin: J. Cramer, 2007), 101–4.

The visitors' book: new directions in research

An approach that rigorously and systematically explores and compares visitors' books' literary properties is informed by three distinct bodies of scholarship: (1) the history of the book, with its interest in scribal and reading practices, as well as descriptive bibliography; (2) the spatial turn in cultural geography, with its focus on the inhabitation of space, place-making, and performance; and (3) the growing interest in, and scholarship on, the phenomenology of traveller and tourist experiences. The hotel has become the centre of extensive study by scholars interested in its social, cultural, commercial, and political functions, and in aspects of hotel life and hotel culture – anomie and surveillance, for instance – that have intrigued social scientists and made the spaces of the hotel loci of study, as well as settings in film and literature, since the early twentieth century.[4] Its importance has not been lost on historians, who see the sector as a vector of modern capitalism, as well as an expression of colonialism.[5] The visitors' book offers an empirical basis for evaluating the claims of scholars of hotel culture – and expanding the history of the hotel as a cultural, social, and commercial institution.

Such a research agenda begins with the premise that a visitors' book is much more than a record of a visit, or indeed the creation of visitors: it is an artefact of a specific hotel culture that records – or, more precisely, develops – power relations between host and guest, amongst guests, and speaks to the wider politico-legal cultures that govern hotel life. While many conventions that centre on a visitors' book may relate to the particular place of commercial accommodation in which it is placed, its wider social, cultural, and commercial meaning is derived from a long history, from its positioning in realms of private and public use, and from its specific legal status. Practices centred on, and evaluations of, it are influenced by local, regional, national, and transnational contexts.

Despite the visitors' book's value as a window onto social and cultural, as well as commercial history, it has suffered from neglect and its dismissal as a specimen of ephemera.

[4]Early sociological interest encompasses the work of Norman Hayner in the United States of America; see Norman S. Hayner, 'Hotel Life and Personality', *The American Journal of Sociology* 33, no. 5 (1928): 784–95 and Norman S. Hayner, *Hotel Life* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1936), and the famous work of Siegfried Kracauer, "The Hotel Lobby," from *The Mass Ornament: Weimar Essays, 1922–1925*, in *The Cities Culture Reader*, 2nd ed., ed. Malcolm Miles and Iain Borden (London: Routledge, 2004), 33–9. The expansive contemporary sociological interest in commercial accommodation includes studies of social control (Roy C. Wood, 'Hotel Culture and Social Control', *Annals of Tourism Research* 21, no. 1 (1994): 65–80); liminality (Annette Pritchard and Nigel Morgan, 'Hotel Babylon? Exploring Hotels as Liminal Sites of Transition and Transgression', *Tourism Management* 27, no. 5 (2006): 762–72). A recent contribution to the field of contemporary hotel studies is Caroline Field Levander and Matthew Pratt Guterl, *Hotel Life: The Story of a Place Where Anything Can Happen* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015).

[5]The list of works treating the hotel and colonialism is exhaustive, but see as examples Daniella Ohad Smith, 'Hotel Design in British Mandate Palestine: Modernism and the Zionist Vision', *Politics, Society, Culture* 29, no. 1 (2010): 99–123, Daniel P. S. Goh, 'Capital and the Transfiguring Monumentality of Raffles Hotel', *Mobilities* 5, no. 2 (2010): 177–9; Maurizio Peleggi, 'The Social and Material Life of Colonial Hotels: Comfort Zones as Contact Zones in British Colombo and Singapore, Ca. 1870–1930', *Journal of Social History* 46, no. 1 (2012): 125–53. For recent, monograph-length studies of the American hotel, see Sandoval-Strausz, *Hotel*, and Molly W. Berger, *Hotel Dreams: Luxury, Technology, and Urban Ambition in America, 1829–1929* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011). For the Swiss sector, see Cédric Humair, 'The Hotel Industry and Its Importance in the Technical and Economic Development of a Region: The Lake Geneva Case (1852–1914)', *Journal of Tourism History* 3, no. 3 (2011): 237–65. Business history is also the prism through which Mary Quek explores the hotel as a vector of globalisation in 'Globalising the Hotel Industry 1946–68: A Multinational Case Study of the Intercontinental Hotel Corporation', *Business History* 54, no. 2 (2012): 201–26. For a theoretically rich analysis of hotels, see Robert A. Davidson, 'A Periphery with a View: Hotel Space and the Catalan Modern Experience', *Romance Quarterly* 53 no. 3 (2006): 169–83, and for a superb study of the Cold War and its relationship to the Hilton chain, see Annabel Jane Wharton, *Building the Cold War: Hilton International Hotels and Modern Architecture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

The destruction and dispersal of visitors' books is a barometer of the depreciation to which they were often subject in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. There is a markedly uneven distribution of extant books: Lakeland and Welsh volumes are especially well represented amongst the 55 that we have examined to date, which cover periods up to the Great War. English books represent almost one-half of those from the UK and the Isle of Man in the analysis. This reflects the highly developed networks of English county archives and local historical societies which have acquired them with great energy in the past decade. They appear to survive more often for rural inns than for larger urban commercial establishments and grand hotels – due in part to the different ways these establishments were managed and guests were received. Boarding houses have yielded few records – perhaps because of the more informal character of their business, and the instability of that branch of the commercial accommodation sector. That absence leaves a major lacuna in research for places in which working-class visitors predominated, and where the market was geared towards lower cost accommodation in private homes – resorts such as Blackpool where, thankfully, we have John Walton's meticulous work, largely drawing on other records.[6] Some visitors' books appear from time to time at auction, their value usually linked to the proportion of famous hands that grace their pages, or the cachet of the hostelry in which they were once inscribed. Others are in local repositories, or in the hands of proprietors or former proprietors: this can vary by country and indeed by region, depending on collection mandates, priorities, and interests of specific bodies and individuals. An imperative behind any effort to explore the visitors' book as an historical record is to begin to identify the range of places where they are held – with the help of the commercial hospitality sector and archives, former proprietors, and, surprisingly, other historical records. Contemporary printed commentary on visitors' books, which recounted their contents and often evaluated their merits as texts, can be used to identify hostelries which may still hold, and even use, such volumes: many institutions identified by Fitzwater Wray in his 1937 survey of the books, for instance, are extant, and their books are traceable.[7] Though aggregated by him under the title 'Visitor's Book [*sic*]', their appellations are as varied as the type of establishment in which they are found: inns, huts, and commercial hotels.

The designation 'visitors' book' is deceptive, however much it may signal the critical roles of a hostelry's guests in its production. It does not reflect the range of other actors who engaged with it, nor does it convey the claims of legal, if not literary, proprietorship made by innkeepers in whose establishments it rested. It is perhaps worthwhile reflecting on the nomenclature associated with volumes in which visitors' inscribed at places of commercial accommodation both in the UK and elsewhere. In English there is the 'visitors' album', which suggests a relationship between these books and other volumes that were designated albums.[8] There is 'inn album'; 'hotel book'; 'arrival book'; 'guestbook'; 'strangers' book' (which appears to be an English adaptation of a continental styling); and the *Fremdenbüch*, which seems to have no equivalent in English. There is the

[6]John K. Walton has written extensively on the subject of the seaside. See, for instance, *The British Seaside: Holidays and Resorts in the Twentieth Century* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000); his classic study of an icon of Blackpool remains *The Blackpool Landlady: A Social History* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1978).

[7]Fitzwater Wray ('Kuklos'), *The Visitor's Book* (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, 1937).

[8]On this point, see 'Guestbooks', *The Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science, and Art* 50, no. 1308 (20 November 1880): 642–3.

livre d'or in French which, like the 'visitors' book' is not restricted in use to the hotel, and was used as a record of leisurely inscription rather than a business record, or a compulsory register of guests. In fact, the multiple spaces of the visitors' book outside the hotel, some of which, such as museums, have attracted the attention of contemporary social scientists, remind us that it was widely used outside commercial accommodation.[9] They also direct us to a theoretically informed literature that can enrich studies of the hotel visitors' book.

In short, the first challenge of studying the visitors' book is defining it as a source – by its name, by its location, by its functions, or by some combination of all three features. There are obvious contrasts, for instance, between surfaces for voluntary inscription, reading, and informal superintendence and those associated with compulsory registration. The distinction between the two in the UK is highly salient when registers were adopted during the Great War, since the UK and other common-law jurisdictions had hitherto eschewed continental style, compulsory registration. Those registers, their structure, and the procedures by which they were superintended, reveal that they were creatures of the state, closely regulated by law. But even before registers were adopted in the UK, some commentators lamented that vibrant, eclectic, scrapbook style volumes had given way to mere lists of names. In exploring the properties of these books over the course of the long nineteenth century, this paper argues in favour of integrating two distinctive source sets to illuminate histories of travel. One set comprises the *books themselves*. It extends the study of entries to treat inscriptions as literary productions, traces the evolution of inscriptions, and patterns of transfer between books, and considers them individually and collectively as indexes of cultural, social, and commercial developments. Another source set is the textual field that *surrounded* the books, especially printed reader responses published principally as travelogues in a number of formats, as well as popular and scholarly histories of the album genre which mapped its textual genealogy. Before proceeding to discuss how such an integrated textual study expand the current framework of analysis of the visitors' book, it is fruitful to explore, from the outset, its historical status as a book.

The visitors' book in book history

Visitors' books were not mere lists. They were also a form of literature, with distinctive literary characteristics and physical forms. As artefacts of hotel culture, they are remarkably diverse, ranging in size, shape, binding, ornamentation, and internal

[9]Konstantinos Andriotis, 'Sacred Site Experience: A Phenomenological Study', *Annals of Tourism Research* 36, no. 1 (2009): 64–84; Anastasia Chourmouziadi, 'Scripta Manent: Notes on a Book', *Public Archaeology: Archaeological Ethnographies* 8, no. 2–3 (2009): 208–24; Sharon Macdonald, 'Accessing Audiences: Visiting Visitor Books', *Museum and Society* 3, no. 3 (2005): 119–36. Anna Maria Miglietta, Ferdinando Boero, and Genuario Belmonte, 'Museum Management and Visitors Book: There Might be a Link?', *Museologia Scientifica* nuova serie 6, no. 1–2 (2012): 91–8; Chaim Noy, 'Pages as Stages: A Performance Approach to Visitor Books', *Annals of Tourism Research* 35, no. 2 (2008): 509–28; and Chaim Noy, '"I was Here!": Addressivity Structures and Inscribing Practices as Indexical Resources', *Discourse Studies* 11, no. 4 (2011): 421–40; Liesbet Nys, 'The Public's Signatures: Visitors' Books in Nineteenth Century Museums', *Museum History Journal* 2, no. 2 (2009): 143–62; see Andrew J. Pekakirk, 'Understanding Visitor Comments: The Case of the Flight Time Barbie', *Curator* 40, no.1 (1997): 56–68; Anastasia G. Stamou and Stephanos Paraskevopoulos, 'Ecotourism Experiences in Visitors' Books of a Greek Reserve: A Critical Discourse Analysis Perspective', *Sociologia Ruralis* 43, no. 1 (2003): 34–55.

structure.[10] These material qualities demand closer attention and interpretation in relation to the commercial and emotional values attached to the books, and to their diverse uses. Some are leather-bound folio volumes embossed with the name of the hotel. Others are simply bound, inexpensive, and similar to contemporary autograph and sentimental albums. Many have markings on the inside front cover which identify the stationer from whom the book was procured, with a number specific to the book. We need to know more about the production, distribution, and cost of these books, how they were ordered, made, delivered, paid for, and then reordered as required.[11] How did their material forms reflect the status claims and resources of hostelry owners and guests? The expansion of travel, and the growth of hotels, coincided with the rise of the steam press, and the emergence of technologies that made these books more accessible – and more disposable. Seeing the popularisation of the visitors' book as bound with technologies and industrial manufacture can help us to better understand the position of the visitors' book within the printing and stationery trade, and allow us to ally it to the study of the album trade more generally. Does sheer diversity in structure and form suggest that the visitors' book was a mass commodity, marketed as a generic album that could be adapted for a variety of uses?

Beyond descriptive bibliography, the emplacement of the visitors' book within book history also invites an interrogation of the genealogies of the form, which engaged many armchair scholars in the nineteenth century. Examining the material and textual features of contemporary visitors' books, scrapbooks, and autograph albums, they asked if and how they were related, and what their origins were. Their reflections were circulated in print as new technologies fuelled the expansion of the press, and as industrial book production brought cheaper accounts of travel to an increasingly literate public. Those developments also enabled the circulation of particular epigrams – 'missed the view, but viewed the mist', for instance – and aphorisms that populated visitors' books and betokened not only exchanges that occurred between their pages, but between them and other books. The technological, commercial, and social developments which expanded the output of books and the dissemination of texts to an expanding reading public constituted critical contexts for exploring the popularisation of the album form.

The generic features and textual genealogy of the visitors' book

This leads to a second area of investigation: the literary matrix of which the visitors' book was part. Many writers addressed this and other questions centred on the history, literary quality, and social and cultural statuses of the visitors' book in the nineteenth century. Frequently they compared it with other manuscript books, past and present. A writer commented in 1850 that

> 'Visitors' Books,' which are now becoming so fashionable … ought to be named 'Albums,' rather than visitors' books; for they often contain effusions quite as sincere, and fully as

[10] An excellent overview is provided by Jane Rutherston, 'Victorian Album Structures', *The Paper Conservator* 23, no. 1 (1999): 13–25. The wider context of the trade is provided in William St Clair, *The Reading Nation in the Romantic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

[11] The excellent surveys of printing and publishing history in the UK in the nineteenth century provide a strong foundation to integrate the narrative of the album's evolution: see Michael F. Suarez, S.J. and Michael L. Turner, eds., *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain Volume 5: 1695–1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009) and David McKitterick, ed., *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain Volume 6: 1830–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

> poetic, too, as those to be found in those little square books, which used to be poked by young ladies into the hands of every 'talented' friend, with a request that he would fill a page with 'something pretty.'[12]

Much of the contemporary evaluation (and depreciation) of the book linked it to forms such as the autograph book and scrapbook, asserting that the quality of inscription united them, as well as generic material features such as bound volumes of black pages that were progressively filled, usually, but not always, sequentially. If contemporaries regarded the hotel visitors' book as a species of album – as a *social* scrapbook – can we widen the lens of analysis to explore its properties as a species of that genre? There is remarkably rich historical scholarship focussing on these other album forms, especially within the context of material culture and women's and gender history.[13] In comparison, work on hotel books is paltry. Yet in the nineteenth century, there is abundant evidence not only that the visitors' book was understood as an album, but that there were complex regimes of reading and inscription, and textual hierarchies, that governed it. In 'The Three Kings' inn at Basel, for instance, apart from the *Fremdenbüch*, a special *Furstenbuch*, 'magnificently bound' and boasting 'a finely illuminated

[12] *North Wales Chronicle*, July 20, 1850.

[13] There is an abundant literature to aid us in this endeavor. See, for instance, David Allan, *Commonplace Books and Reading in Georgian England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Patrizia di Bello, 'Mrs Birkbeck's Album: the Handwritten and the Printed in Early Nineteenth-century Feminine Culture', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineeteenth Century* 1 (2005), doi:10.16995/ntn.435; Justyna Beinek, '"Portable Graveyards": Albums in the Romantic Culture of Memory', *Pushkin Review* 14 (2011): 35–62. Cindy Dickinson, 'Creating a World of Books, Friends, and Flowers: Gift Books and Inscriptions, 1825–60', *Winterthur Portfolio* 31, no. 1 (1996): 53–66; Ellen Gruber Garvey, *Writing with Scissors: American Scrapbooks from the Civil War to the Harlem Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Thomas A. Green and Lisa Devaney, 'Linguistic Play in Autograph Book Inscriptions', *Western Folklore* 48, no. 1 (1989): 51–8; Anne Higonnet, 'Secluded Vision: Images of Feminine Experience in Nineteenth-century Europe', in *The Expanding Discourse: Feminism and Art History*, ed. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard (New York: IconEditions, 2002), 170–85; Sandro Jung, 'The Illustrated Pocket Diary: Generic Continuity and Innovation, 1820–40', *Victorian Periodicals Review* 45, no. 1 (2012): 23–48; S. Jung, 'Illustrated Pocket Diaries and the Commodification of Culture', *Eighteenth-Century Life* 37, no. 2 (2013): 53–84; Andrea Kunard, 'Traditions of Collecting and Remembering: Gender, Class and the Nineteenth-century Sentiment Album and Photographic Album', *Early Popular Visual Culture* 4, no. 3 (2006): 227–43; Kathryn Ledbetter, '"Begemmed and Beamuletted": Tennyson and Those "Vapid" Gift Books', *Victorian Poetry* 34, no. 2 (1996): 235–45; K. Ledbetter, '"White Vellum and Gilt Edges": Imaging *The Keepsake*', *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 30, no. 1 (1997): 35–49; Sara Lodge, 'Romantic Reliquaries: Memory and Irony in the Literary Annuals', *Romanticism* 10, no. 1 (2004): 23–40. Brian E. Maidment, 'Scraps and Sketches: Miscellaneity, Commodity Culture and Comic Prints, 1820–40', *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century* 5 (2007). doi:10.16995/ntn.462 (accessed August 17, 2015); Samantha Matthews, 'Importunate Applications and Old Affections: Robert Southey's Album Verses', *Romanticism* 17, no. 1 (2011): 77–93; S. Matthews, '"O All Pervading Album': Place and Displacement in Romantic Albums and Album Poetry," in *Romantic Localities: Europe writes Place*, ed. Christoph Bode and Jacqueline Labbe (London: Pickering & Chatto, 2010), 99–116; S. Matthews, 'Album', *Victorian Review* 34, no. 1 (2008): 13–17; S. Matthews, 'Psychological Crystal Palace?: Late Victorian Confession Albums', *Book History* 3, no. 1 (2000): 125–54; Amy Mecklenburg-Faenger, 'Trifles, Abominations, and Literary Gossip: Gendered Rhetoric and Nineteenth-Century Scrapbooks', *Genders* 55 (2012). http://go.galegroup.com.subzero.lib.uoguelph.ca/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CA286826971&v=2.1&u=guel77241&it=r&p=AONE&sw=w&asid=060dc67524e68a17e271b3f03bf2485a (accessed August 17, 2015); Manuela Mourão, 'Remembrance of Things Past: Literary Annuals' Self-Historicization', *Victorian Poetry* 50, no. 1 (2012): 107–23; Lisa Reid Ricker, '(De)Constructing the Praxis of Memory-keeping: Late Nineteenth-century Autograph Albums as Sites of Rhetorical Invention', *Rhetoric Review* 29, no. 3 (2010): 239–56. Susan M. Stabile, "Female Curiosities: The Transatlantic Female Commonplace Book," in *Reading Women: Literacy, Authorship, and Culture in the Atlantic World, 1500–1800*, ed. Heidi Brayman Hackel and Catherine E. Kelly (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 217–43; Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, 'An American Album, 1857', *The American Historical Review* 115, no. 1 (2010): 1–25; Susan Tucker, Katherine Ott, and Patricia P. Buckler, eds., *The Scrapbook in American Life* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2006); Jennifer Wallace, 'Classics as Souvenir: L.E.L. and the Annuals', *Classical Receptions Journal* 3, no. 1 (2011): 109–28; Pamela Woof, 'The Uses of Notebooks: From Journal to Album, from Commonplace to Keepsake', *The Journal of the Friends of Coleridge* 31, no. 31 (2008): 1–18; Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray, 'Is It a Diary, Commonplace Book, Scrapbook, or Whatchamacallit?: Six Years of Exploration in New England's Manuscript Archives', *Libraries & the Cultural Record* 44, no. 1 (2008): 101–23; Meguido Zola, '"By Hook or by Crook": New Look at the Autograph Book', *New York Folklore* 6, no. 3–4 (1980): 185–94.

title page' was maintained to receive the autographs of royal visitors.[14] This avenue of investigation, exploring the contemporary textual matrix within which the visitors' book was discussed, is closely connected to a related line of inquiry: how was the visitors' book emplotted within a generic history that embraced the walls of Herculaneum, the codices that recorded guests at medieval monasteries, and verses cut in glass by diamond rings at early modern inns?

A question in *Notes and Queries* in 1853 hints at an issue that had already occupied (Victoire-Joseph) Étienne de Jouy. His reflections on the genre penned under the nom-de-plume 'l'Hermite de la Chaussée d'Antin', had been propounded earlier in the century.[15] What, the *Notes and Queries* correspondent, 'D.', asked several decades later, was the origin of the:

> friendly memorial book so well known among us as an *album*? Was it not first used by the learned men of Germany as a repository for the complimentary tributes of their foreign visitors? Is there any mention of it in any English author earlier than Izaak Walton, who tells us that Sir Henry Wotton, when ambassador at Venice, wrote in the *album* of Christopher Flecamore a Latin sentence to the effect that 'an ambassador is an honest man, sent to lie abroad for the good of his country?' Where is the earliest *specimen* of an English *album*, according to the modern form and use of the scrap-book so called?[16]

A reply offered in a subsequent number of the title revealed a deep textual genealogy, asserting that the earliest albums functioning as a 'friendly memorial book' where the registers of the dead kept at churches and monasteries. Friends' and benefactors' names were recorded in the albums so that prayers may be offered for them.[17] The first use of the term was attributed to Bede, and the earliest specimen, residing at the British Library, was the Book of Life of Durham Cathedral. In expounding the modern album's lineage, the correspondent revealed receptions of the genre in the nineteenth century. Broadly speaking, these receptions framed the books in comparative terms. The first evaluated it in relation to contemporary generic cousins, in manuscript and print;[18] the second traced a continuous generic history and used storied textual forebears as foils to underscore the modern form's literary descent. Indeed, the correspondent writing in response to the initial *Query*, writing under the name 'Ceyrep', ended the summary of the album's generic genealogy by remarking that:

> Not need we add that this album affords a relief to the eye wearied with looking over the pages of a modern album, and to the mind sick of the endless but monotonous repetition of imaginary ruins, love sonnets, and moss roses.

Examining this discourse of textual depreciation illuminates how certain albums were upheld as models for *how* such books should be used, and contrasted with the quality of nineteenth-century descendants.

[14] *Nottingham Evening Post*, September 2, 1901.
[15] *L'hermite de la Chaussée-d'Antin, ou observations sur les mœurs et les usages Parisiens au commencement du xixe siècle* (Paris: Chez Pillet, Imprimeur-Libraire, Michaud Frères, Libraires, 1812).
[16] '*Album*', *Notes and Queries* 7 no. 175 (5 March 1853), 235–6.
[17] 'Ceyrep', '*Album* (Vol. vii., 235.)', *Notes and Queries* 7 no. 179 (2 April 1853), 341–2.
[18] See Katherine D. Harris, *Forget Me Not: The Rise of the British Literary Annual, 1823–1835* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2015).

Experiences of reading and writing in the visitors' book

Printed readers' responses supply us with some evidence of how people traced the history of the visitors' book and sketched a textual genealogy of the album. There was an abundance of contemporary commentary on the visitors' book at home and abroad, capped by Fitzwater Wray's quirky but invaluable 1937 eulogy to the form as he travelled the length and breadth of Ireland and Britain on a mission to survey and mine extant books. The UK benefits from Wray's efforts, and it had other chroniclers, chiefly of the inn – Charles G. Harper, James John Hissey – who made the visitors' books of these establishments the objects of their sedulous attention in the early years of the twentieth century, when the motorcar allowed them to penetrate regions where such establishments endured.[19] These and many other authors also engaged in public self-fashioning using the visitors' book as a discursive tool. To this end, it is instructive to survey the terms these readers employed in recounting their experiences: the prevalence of such actions as 'leafing through', 'glimpsing at', and 'dipping into' the volumes suggest that they were not read sequentially or in a sustained way – or at least that, in print, few people would admit to sustained and sequential reading of material that was widely stigmatised. Printed readers' responses have their own tropes – many denoting a studied distance and detachment from the volumes, and an almost anthropological interest in their contents and the motivations of inscribers. Exploring these sources allows us to examine space, affect, and interrelated practices of reading and writing.[20]

There is a notable absence of commentary on acts of writing in, as opposed to reading, the books in printed, retrospective accounts. Unease with the visitors' book as a tableau for authentic self-expression, given the criticism that attended it as a site of banality and excesses, may account for this focus. Few dared to endorse the view expounded in the *Saturday Review* in 1907: 'in a visitors' book of an old country inn you can dare to be yourself'.[21] In contrast, narratives of reading could allow the individual opportunities to mock and satirise the books, forging alliances with readers whom they entertained with their witty condescension towards the trivialities of the volumes, and also, more unusually, with the relatively few visitors' book inscribers whose acid remarks they endorsed. Indeed, to some writers, retorts and critiques within the manuscript books redeemed the volumes by supplying evidence that not all who took up pens to inscribe in it were throwing off their reserve or critical aptitudes in favour of treacly sentimentality that the books seemed to elicit. As one writer remarked approvingly, 'if the poetry is defective, there is, as a rule, plenty of criticism to follow.'[22] The result was a salutary articulation of literary discernment for those who were not seduced by the book's invitation to quasi-Byronic indulgence. One commentator noted: 'Quite a controversy often rages as to the merits of a rhyme. Indeed not a few people seem to discover for the first time that they possess the critical faculty'.[23] The dismissal of the visitors' book's sentiments as derivative

[19]Charles G. Harper, *The Old Inns of Old England*, vol. 1 (London: Chapman and Hall, 1906), 291–308. Hissey's oeuvre is expansive: see as one example *The Charm of the Road* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1910), 251–4.

[20]See Rachel Ablow, ed., *The Feeling of Reading: Affective Experience and Victorian Literature* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010); Eve Tavor Bannet, 'History of Reading: The Long Eighteenth Century', *Literature Compass* 10 (2013): 112–133. Fred Schurink, 'Manuscript Commonplace Books, Literature, and Reading in Early Modern England', *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 73, no. 3 (2010): 453–69. Victoria E. Burke supplies an excellent review in 'Recent Studies in Commonplace Books', *English Literary Renaissance* 43, no. 1 (2013): 153–77.

[21]'Visitors' Books', *The Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science, and Art* 104, no. 2701 (3 August 1907): 141–2 (141).

[22]*Evening Standard*. Reprinted in *Newcastle Courant*, May 9, 1891.

[23]Ibid.

and unoriginal was bound with wider assessments of the growth of tourism: if increasing numbers of travellers drawn from all stations of life could now disrupt bucolic England and the once solitary majesty of Alpine Europe, the visitors' book bore testament to their unrefined travel practices and a new, demotic social literature of travel.[24]

Critics despaired of, and disparaged, the fatuities, the florid prose and verse, of the books. Can we re-cast their conclusions, and looking at the books themselves, outside the project of self-fashioning, and detect either the pulse of a popular Romanticism, or perhaps even clever parody, where contemporaries found pseudo-Byronic drivel? What might that reveal about the nature of inscription? Can we speak of national literary styles that are reflected in the structure and content matter of books that recorded the names and nationalities of guests? Contemporaries certainly asserted that there was a marked national inflection, discernible in the content and style of the entry.[25] We can fruitfully test the proposition made in 1873 that the 'visitors books of foreign hotels now-a-days are merely a dry register of names and dates and destinations, with no more interest than a "Bradshaw" or a statistical blue-book'.[26] But is there also evidence of a Transatlantic style, which bound Anglophone, common-law jurisdictions together, and reflected the shared legal status of the visitors' book? Is there evidence of that which historians seek, and which many contemporaries detected: change over time? Even if, as one commentator asserted, the verses of the visitors' book were 'atrociously bad', nonetheless there was 'much that is suggestive of the period about it. There is a primness, for instance, in the verses written in the beginning of the [nineteenth] century, especially of these which were the efforts of budding poetesses of the time'.[27] To us, these textual features also reveal the contested status of the text and of the genre more generally, which were handled in different ways inside and outside the books. They demand that we consider the vital role of the books in public discourse, and the printed sources which constituted that discourse, as we explore the books themselves.

The Alps had once inspired the pens of geniuses and lay at the heart of complex affective and intellectual responses that were heavily influenced by the aesthetic code of the sublime. They elicited qualitatively different responses from visitors' book inscribers, if people such as Albert Smith are to be believed. Smith, the veteran Alpinist and writer, was equal parts scathing and amusing in his denunciations of the fatuities of the modern visitors' book, finding in the *livre des voyageurs* in the dining room at the Hôtel de Londres at Chamonix ample evidence of its reputation as a repository of insipidities. Extracting some of the choicest inscriptions for readers, and suggesting they proceeded from the same *cacoethis scribendi* that had seen tourists deface ancient monuments, Smith remarked that:

> The majority of them, it will be seen, are in English, as these kind of effusions generally are; probably resulting from a vanity of the same impulse which prompts us to write out names on Memmon's nose, or cut our initials on the picture-frames at Hampton Court.[28]

[24]See 'A Fortnight in Switzerland [By the Editor], Chapter IV, "Travelling Companions"', *The Western Gazette*, September 12, 1879.
[25]See the remarks on mountaineers in *Morning Post*, August 28, 1873.
[26]*The Morning Post*, August 25, 1883.
[27]'Literary Tourists', *Evening Standard*. Reprinted in *Newcastle Courant*, May 9, 1891.
[28]Albert Smith, 'Loose Leaves from the Travellers' Album at Chamonix', *Bentley's Miscellany* 10 (1841): 576–81 (578). See also a piece in a periodical conducted by A. Smith, 'The Latest Chronicle of Fools', *The Month: A View of Passing Subjects and Manners, Home and Foreign, Social and General by Albert Smith and John Leech* (September 1851): 203–10.

In a remarkable interlacing of his authorial identity with that of the critical inscriber for whom he found some sympathy, Smith chose several selections in which an original entry had been followed by a caustic or playful comment. Smith's excoriation of the visitors' books banalities in his satirical project had apparent implications for travellers, with one reporting that an entry in the Chamonix book read: 'Nobody never writes anything funny in this book since Mister Albert Smith says it's not genteel', with an appended remark that 'He is a gent' and a retort from Smith himself which was 'of course, a forgery'.[29] Smith, on the vanguard of a critique of the book that mixed snobbery and satire with a kind of lurid fascination with the tomes, especially in the Alpine regions which he popularised, was the scourge of the visitors' book inscriber. He was also its victim: a well-known story made its rounds that a wag had appended a pithy remark underneath a hotel book marked by Smith's initials 'A.S.': 'Two-thirds of the truth'.[30] This Smith took in stride, it was said: he was willing to applaud a good joke as readily as he was to mock, in 'deservedly caustic and severe' tones, what a writer described as the 'incongruous collection of feeble platitudes, imbecile twaddle, and impertinent remarks to be found in the visitors' books at Continental hotels'.[31] Was inscribers' putative lack of originality part of much wider phenomenon – rising literacy, but also the continuing popularity of epigrams, *bon mots* and short verses that, in their amenability to recitation and memorisation, reveals to us the persistence of oral culture?[32] When critics of the book derided the derivative character of inscriptions, and detected the hand of the plagiarist within it, they may have unwittingly revealed that the migration of words and phrases was due not only to the increased movement of people, but also to the dissemination of particular epigrams, aphorisms, and verses from manuscript to manuscript, manuscript to print, and print to manuscript, in circuits over space and time. Any familiar phrasing was condemned as unoriginal, violating unwritten protocols of inscription and affronting the reader.

To denounce the visitors' book in a printed reading response was a complex and time-consuming act of reading, transcription, and subsequent circulation, in print, of a polemic that was often generously sprinkled with examples of the most egregious drivel. In amassing so many examples from travels, Arnold Smith and others provided us further evidence of the extent not only to which Britons travelled, but also how their conventions of inscription and reading intermingled with, were shaped by, and contrasted with, people whom they only met vicariously, in visitors' books, on their travels. Projects of self-fashioning made extensive use of the book as an object of scorn – but not exclusively so.

Authors who observed a surfeit of English inscriptions in Swiss books, and construed them as an index of the expanding scope of English travel (as Albert Smith did) also saw visitors' books as evidence of literary styles and leisure practices that migrated alongside the traveller – and remained imprinted on its pages long after they had left. The affective dimensions of reading the book were complex, and contribute to expanding the textual

[29]'R.P.', correspondence in the *New York Evening Post*, dated September 9, 1855, reprinted the *Faversham Weekly Journal*, November 3, 1855.
[30]*Worcestershire Chronicle*, August 6, 1856.
[31]'Where Shall We Go?', *Tinsley's Magazine. An Illustrated Monthly* 5 (1870): 207–12 (207).
[32]I am grateful to Dr. David Allan, School of History, St. Andrews University, for generously sharing his insights on this subject.

base for exploring affect and tourist experience.[33] Dissenting from Smith's infamous deprecations, a writer in the *London Review* praised the visitors' book value as a text that could conjure Proustian recollections with a leaf through its pages. A reader could relive previous visits, and encounter in its pages old friends.[34] This writer was not alone, for another, writing in the *Leeds Mercury*, quoted the opening lines of a doggerel verse he read at an inn at Schwarenbach. Affirming a 'fascination' with such volumes that he 'cannot resist', the author found the mark of old friends who had preceded him, including, evidently, the autograph of a former romantic interest – 'the signature of somebody who was once Somebody (with a big S, if you please print) indeed, to me. She crossed the Pass last year with her husband my odious but successful rival'.[35] Other intimates, and famous names, too, lent an air of familiarity to the remote place: 'In short, one can hardly feel lonely, even in this desolate forsaken spot, as we turn the leaves of the huge folio volume, and call up, with name after name, visions of faces we have seen elsewhere'. Clearly, some readers were rewarded by inspections of the books; the nostalgia their printed responses conveyed contrasts with the broadly satirical or outright scornful appraisals penned by others.

Where do the contents of the manuscript books themselves fit into this analysis? We have seen that when the visitors' book was deprecated as an inferior album type in the nineteenth century, it was usually with an admixture of playful mockery and scorn, reflecting anxiety surrounding its uses and misuses, and reflecting a broader re-evaluation of album reading and writing practices.[36] These concerns played out within the pages of the volumes, too. Textual features of the visitors' book yield rich insight into the reading and inscribing strategies and experiences, too. Marginalia,[37] scratches that appear to deliberately obscure previous inscriptions, excisions, and, more prosaically, entries that replicate reference, invoke, or recall other inscriptions, in the same book or in others, point us to the tropes within particular volumes, and to generic features across a number of texts. They reveal the interlaced strategies of reading and inscribing.[38] Why were inscribers often inclined to write their entries in ways that subverted the conventional horizontal linearity of the page, sometimes favouring scrawling script, sometimes small 'scratches', and what does this suggest to us about the reading experience? What do we make of the mark of the much-written about 'caustic commentator' found in many volumes, who enjoyed issuing disparaging remarks from the margins of the visitors' book pages, and how do we account for this figure's absence in many volumes? How do we account for the apparent affinities that develop between visitors' book inscribers and those who penned printed readers' responses? There was an evident identification between

[33]Philipp Felsch, 'Mountains of Sublimity, Mountains of Fatigue: Towards a History of Speechlessness in the Alps', *Science in Context* 22, no. 3 (2009): 341–64. See, for the case of the German Alps, Ben M. Anderson, 'The Construction of an Alpine Landscape: Building, Representing and Affecting the Eastern Alps, c. 1885–1914', *Journal of Cultural Geography* 29, no. 2 (2012): 155–83. Peter Hansen explores the affective experience of mountaineering in the post-Enlightenment period in *The Summits of Modern Man: Mountaineering after the Enlightenment* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).
[34]'The Visitors-book at Our Swiss Inn', *London Review*. Reprinted in *The Daily News*, October 26, 1867.
[35]*Leeds Mercury*, October 10, 1874.
[36]Leah Price, *How to Do Things with Books in Victorian Britain* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2012).
[37]Here we benefit from the insights of many scholars of early modern and Romantic-era texts: see H.J. Jackon, *Romantic Readers: The Evidence of Marginalia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005); H.J. Jackson, *Marginalia: Readers Writing in Books* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001).
[38]Heidi Brayman Hackel, *Reading Material in Early Modern England: Print, Gender, and Literacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

the caustic commentator and satirists who enjoyed their biting marginal commentary, just as there was between the versifiers and prose inscribers whose entries stirred the souls of travellers and transported them into the realms of the past. An analysis that treats the relations between these manuscript and printed texts, and their creators, would illustrate how far an integrated analysis can develop our understanding of affect and the visitors' book.

Evidently, the mid-Victorian era furnishes ample evidence for exploring how people wrote *about* reading visitors' books (often writing *to* the books, which became a trope in verse in prose accounts of travel). There was a strong interest, too, in the physical integrity of the volumes illuminated by both visitors' books and printed readers' responses. In particular, they can reveal the extent of, and extent of concern with, the extraction of material *from* the books, either through facsimile, transcription, memorisation or, most notoriously, physical excision. A related set of questions that centres specifically on the book could explore how the material within it physically circulated and also how it was suppressed; one property of the visitors' book was, after all, that it was intended to remain within the walls of a hostelry. By what means, furtive or authorised, did it and its contents circulate beyond it? The physical absence of material demands close attention; so too do possible narratives of which there are no traces pages of the book, perhaps because conventions of inscription proscribed them. Silences are telling, and may reflect a variety of strategies on the part of guest and innkeeper. As a writer in the *Evening Standard* asserted, in surveying the characteristics of the visitors' book, a record judged 'too eulogistic':

> But it is, we believe, the fact that no adverse criticism was ever found recorded in a visitors' book. If the page is examined, however, it generally turns out that whole pages have here and there been more or less neatly removed with a pen-knife. One wonders what was written on these missing leaves. They arouse one's curiosity much more than the pages of blotted calligraphy that lie open to one's hand. If you inquire as to how it happened, the story is always the same, that some distinguished personage or other, always very highly distinguished, had been staying in the inn or hotel, and had expressed his opinion on its many merits, and some autograph hunter had deliberately stolen the valuable record. Now, one can believe anything of an autograph hunter; but still we would like to see some of those missing leaves.[39]

Here the printed response leads us back to the evidence in the book: while the pen-knife-wielding innkeeper came under scrutiny and some suspicion,[40] much more often the mutilation of the books was attributed to the nefarious designs of the autograph-prizing guest. Whatever material was physically extracted from volumes – and the lines of the pen-knife are visible in many British volumes – it is useful to explore practices and meanings of manuscript extraction. They can be profitably situated within wider social, cultural, and commercial contexts of nineteenth-century autograph-seeking, and the market for autographs. And the extent and distribution of excision can be examined across time, space, and institutional types. The American writer Howard Payson Arnold remarked on that 'class of travellers that seems to examine hotel records, not the purpose of

[39]'Literary Tourists', *Evening Standard*. Reprinted in *Newcastle Courant*, May 9, 1891.

[40]See correspondence by Richard Keysell in *The Daily Mail*, September 15, 1856, in which he refers to an incident in which Keysell met two visitors whose experience with ill-trained mules was so bad that they recorded cautions to fellow tourists in the visitors' book of their hotel. The leaf of the book had subsequently been torn out, their strong suspicion being that the proprietor was a friend of the mules' owner.

adding anything to them, but to abstract what it already there', and offered evidence of the 'plunderer's' designs at Zermatt, where the hotel landlord had locked up the book in which the British Alpinist Lord Francis Douglas, who had died on the Matterhorn, had inscribed his name.[41] The innkeeper had perhaps been alarmed by the excision of the famous climber's name from the book at Randa, from which Douglas had commenced his ascent of Mischbelhornen in 1865. Again, Swiss inns, where British writers rhapsodised if not about the quality, then at least the historic character, of visitors' books, would repay attention, as that country's historic hostelries had attracted the Romantics, as well as great figures in mountaineering around whom the cult of literary and sporting celebrity developed in the late-eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. They offer opportunities to investigate the extent of the British presence there, the extent of their imprint, and the prevalence of such practices as facsimile, transcription, and excision.[42]

The comparative lens

Building a comparative research programme grounded in an analysis of both visitors' books and the material written about them across national boundaries over time is ambitious, but potentially highly rewarding. More than anywhere outside the UK, Switzerland is the place to which British travel writers turned when they explored visitors' books abroad, and is the most logical site for exploring the evolution of literary and travel practices at a time when traffic to the country was growing greatly.[43] There was a historic interest to Switzerland in particular on the part of British travel writers, who had rhapsodised about the raw power of its mountains in the age of Romantic travel; writers on the state of religion on the continent had also found the seat of Calvin's Reformation a place of fascination. In the Victorian era climbers were drawn to Swiss peaks, and streams of visitors sought pleasure and adventure, many also finding the bracing Alpine climate conducive to their health. The Swiss visitors' book was not a creature of the British tourist. Britons found a vital tradition of visitors' books that they may have partly adapted to their own interests – as they scanned them for the records of famous climbs, for instance. But they were no doubt influenced by the cultures of inscription and reading that they encountered there, where they were an important part of an international coterie of travellers.

The survey of extant books, which is now in progress, has firmly established the extent of surviving books in parts of Switzerland.[44] It allows us to compare where and why books survived in Britain and Switzerland. It was an institution of long-standing that Britons encountered with some familiarity based on their own country's practices, but which

[41] Howard Payson Arnold, *The Great Exhibition: With Continental Sketches, Practical and Humorous* (New York: Hurd and Houghton, 1868), 148–9.

[42] For a preliminary survey of guestbooks in the Zermatt area, see Katarzyna Michalkiewicz and Patrick Vincent, 'Victorians in the Alps: A Case Study of Zermatt's Hotel Guest Books and Registers', in *Britain and the Narration of Travel in the Nineteenth Century: Texts, Images, Objects*, ed. Kate Hill (Farnham: Ashgate, 2016), 75–90.

[43] An extensive literature explores the subject of Britons in the Alps and Switzerland. See Ann C. Colley, *Victorians in the Mountains: Sinking the Sublime* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); Susan Barton, *Healthy living in the Alps: The Origins of Winter Tourism in Switzerland 1860–1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008); Michael Heafford, 'Between Grand Tour and Tourism: British Travellers to Switzerland in a Period of Transition, 1814–1860', *The Journal of Transport History* 27, no. 1 (2006): 25–47; Laurent Tissot, 'How Did The British Conquer Switzerland? Guidebooks, Railways, Travel Agencies, 1850–1914', *Journal of Transport History* 16, no. 1 (1995), 21–54.

[44] As of December 2015, 71 sources, mainly in Western Switzerland, had been identified, providing the foundation for a Swiss-wide bibliographic database on extant visitor books and a comparative research project involving several research groups. See the research blog at http://swissguestbookproject.ch/.

also had its own conventions. One major difference, for example, concerns the legal regimes of surveillance that regimented visitors' book and sketched conventions in Switzerland. Individual Swiss cantons introduced registration laws in the early nineteenth century: the canton of Vaud, for example, did so on 6 February 1843. This difference may help explain the lower density of visitors' books versus registers in Switzerland, and the fact that those books that have been found are often in peripheral areas rather than in the main cities.[45] Writing in 1823, Daniel Wilson, the Bishop of Calcutta, confirms that visitor books and registers were not found in the same places, and served divergent purposes. The author credits the Swiss books with preserving the spirit of the album form, notwithstanding the regulations under which guest enumeration operated, and also the woeful mark of the English travellers who tended to undermine its merits:

> In frontier towns the book is often under the regulation of the police; but in small towns in the interior, and places of fashionable resort, as the fall of the Rhine, Mount Righi, &c., it partakes more of the nature of an album, in which travellers write down any sentiments they please, together with their names. Sometimes an opinion is given of the country they have passed through, or advice as to inns and roads; at other times a short poetical effusion is inserted, or a stroke of wit and drollery. You meet occasionally with very admirable thoughts, and bursts of real genius. My friend transcribed a striking copy of verses. It is curious even to look over the hand-writing of celebrated individuals. The strangers' book, further, enables you to compare the number of travellers from different countries. I counted once or twice, and found the English four or five times as numerous as those of any other nation. It is much to be regretted, that the unpardonable license of a few persons, I am afraid chiefly Englishmen, is rapidly tending to put an end to this innocent and gratifying custom, or at least to the confining of it to the dry record of the police towns.

Many decades later, the system of compulsory registration upon which so many British writers commented remained in place, in marked contrast to the UK's cherished practices, upheld by law, of not requiring formal registration.

The visitors' book's status in Britain demarcated it as an object of leisure, permitted anonymous and pseudonymous inscription, and authorised furtive reading, too. It also provided fodder to the satirist, leading to possibly apocryphal inscriptions in which the British tourist defied the impositions of the continental book. In 1860 it was reported that a Briton writing in an hotel book at Lausanne had slyly replied to its many queries: (1) his name: 'My name is William Hoar'; (2) his quality: 'I am no man's cad'; (3) his origin, that is, his country: 'My origin is queer'; (4) where he had come from: 'I come from home'; (5) where he was going: 'And I am going to a very bad place, which I forbear to name'.[46] Many hostelries may have supplied separate books for such fanciful inscriptions, in addition to the legally mandated register,[47] but here at least the newspaper underscored a dogged resistance to continental enumeration. Did the British imagination

[45]Report on the first Swiss Guestbook Research Day, University of Neuchâtel, 4 September 2015, posted on 24 September 2015, http://swissguestbookproject.ch/report-on-our-swiss-guestbooks-research-day/.

[46]*Westmorland Gazette and Kendal Advertiser*, December 1, 1860; identified as being from *Mr Beamont's Tour in France*. He may have been imitating Percy Bysshe Shelley's controversial visitors' book entries in Chamonix in 1816. See Gavin de Beer, 'An "Atheist" in the Alps', *Keats-Shelley Memorial Bulletin* 9 (1958), 1–15.

[47]Mattia Della Corte has identified four basic visitors' book configurations in Switzerland: the foreigner's register (*registre d'étrangers*, *Fremdenbüch*), usually filled in by the hotel staff; a combined register and visitors' book (*registre et livre d'or*) fulfilling the same function as the register, but allowing the customer to write a comment; the signature book, allowing clients to sign their names; and the visitors' book proper (*livre d'or*), which gives free range to the client to write or draw whatever she wished. See Report on the first Swiss Guestbook Research Day.

live on in some books, perhaps beyond Albion's borders, whether or not travellers were apparently supplied there with a special volume for English effusions? Might the periodisation of the visitors' book's decline, often identified with the late nineteenth century in Britain, demand re-evaluation in light of how Britons and other travellers abroad and treated Swiss books?

Uniting the study of the textuality and materiality of the visitors' books with the textual field that surrounded them allows us to compare practices and performances of reading and writing. We could explore how gendered, class, national, regional, and other identities, were articulated in and through the books in Britain and in Switzerland – especially as the clientele of commercial accommodation in both places become more internationalised. We could examine their pages systematically and comparatively and ask within the contexts of the varied affordances of those pages and of the books, how they were inscribed – and how they were read. What proportions of comments were in verse, as opposed to prose? What was the length of entries, and are there discernible patterns that emerge within a page, or within a book? To what extent do sketches and other inscriptions inhabit a volume's pages, and is there common subject matter, images and topics – the portrait, the traveller atop a mule, the fishermen, the penny-farthing – across volumes, space, and time?[48] Were and in what forms do physical excisions occur? The wider textual field of material written about the visitors' book can assist us at a practical level not only identifying books that may yet be extant, but also by supplying with assertions that we can empirically test – such as the claim made in 1900 by one writer in an English cycling periodical that '[a]t inns where cyclists congregate on page after page we find the same name with painful repetition' and, in the same establishments, 'how often do we find the name of a man who plumes himself, apparently, upon being a man of letters, glorying in being able to place about a dozen or more initials of various clubs after his name'.[49] In examining the textual properties of the visitors' books that were closely connected to particular forms of locomotion and leisure – cycling and mountaineering, for example – we can ask if the structure of the books, the form of inscriptions and the thematic material within them, reflect the hostelry's association with these respective activities. Do visitors' books elsewhere, as Fitzwater Wray's claimed of British volumes, bear the mark of the mountaineer far more than that of the climber?[50]

Opening the scope of research to a transnational framework also enables us to explore how distinctive politico-legal environments influenced practices of writing and reading. And it invites us to explore ways in which those regimes were challenged, openly or implicitly, through acts of inscription, reading, and book superintendence in hotels. Subversive acts can be observed at several levels: defying codes which may have been specific to a particular inn, innkeeper, book, and even page (how many inscribers adhered to the spatial affordances and specific solicitations of labelled columns?), and resisting those that were mandated by legal regimes. Consider the perhaps apocryphal but widely circulated story of three American young ladies who filled the column headed 'Occupation' in the

[48]See the description of a sketch by a party of Heidelberg students in a visitors' book entry at the 'rude hotel on the bleak top of Montanvert', alongside the record of 'names, readable and unreadable, observations, facetious, insipid, and sentimental, and some rare things not in any printed edition of the "Curiosities of Literature"'. John W. Corson, *Loiterings in Europe; or, Sketches of Travel in France, Belgium Switzerland, Italy Austria, Prussia, Great Britain, and Ireland, with an Appendix, Containing Observations on European Charities and Medical Institutions* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1848), 119–20.
[49]'H.B.', 'Visitors' Books. The Character Sketches Contained Therein', *Cycling* 7 April 1900, 245–6.
[50]Wray, The Visitor's Book, xi.

visitors' book of their Swiss inn with the entry: 'Looking for a husband'.[51] This might be read on a number of levels: parodying the Yankee tourists' sensibilities – a trope in travel writing – but it also suggests a dissonance in scribal practices that reflected divergent stances towards the book. There is also evidence from both books and reader responses of resistance to the legal requirements of the register. As one traveller in the 1860s wrote:

> Despite the mysterious but threatening announcement of the Bernese Government, that the traveller who does not enter his name, residence and other particulars, in the book provided, much take the consequences of *alle unangenehmlichkeiten*, or all the unpleasantness may occur to him.

One travel writer remarked in 1865, 'I am afraid this duty is shamefully neglected by the sons of Albion'.[52] He proceeded to enumerate entries which exemplified the indelible mark of a national character flowing through the pens of inscribers.

Switzerland figures into this discourse over divergent practices of inscription in ambiguous ways. Daniel Wilson, for example, praised the strangers' book at Mount Righi, confessing that it 'is perhaps, a little galling at first to an Englishman, to be obliged to put down his name, age, country, family, time of arrival, place of destination, motive of journey &c., as soon as he drives into town'.[53] And yet he expressed delight in the compensations supplied by picking up the book and discovering the exploits of 'countrymen or friends' who preceded him, 'and to look back and read the names of travellers in past years'. Contemporaries seem ambivalent about whether changing systems and institutions of commercial accommodation resulted in transformations in the visitors' book's use: in the 1890s, some argued that it was in eclipse.[54] Others remarked that even as the totemic English inn disappeared, the visitors' book endured.[55] Certainly the extent and variety of commercial accommodation expanded through the nineteenth century, with attendant changes in managerial practices, record keeping, and staffing. The visitors' book was no doubt implicated in these changes, and it is imperative to know how. How were scribal and reading practices adapted to the culture of the railway hotel, the grand hotel, the temperance hotel, and the urban hotel, as opposed to the rural inn? Did they persist in some places more than in others, such as climbing inns, even in a transnational context? How were they related to new systems of data collection and the systematisation of hotel management regimes, even before the introduction of compulsory registration in the UK? In 1873, a special correspondent to the *Morning Post* lamented that the *livres des voyageurs* and *Fremdenbücher* of Swiss hostelries were evincing changes. Whereas once they used to be a 'sort of mixture of album and scrap-book and local guide', they were now, 'for the most part, mere registers, with columns for surname and Christian name, and domicile, and occupations'.[56] The old books had been:

[51] *Gloucester Citizen*, August 9, 1888.
[52] 'Switzerland in Summer and Autumn – Part I', *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* 599, no. 98, September 1865, 323–45 (334).
[53] Daniel Wilson, *Travels on the Continent of Europe; through parts of the Netherlands, Switzerland, Northern Italy, and France, in the Summer of 1823* ('From the 4th London ed.', New York: Thomas George, Jr., 1836), Letter 9, 'Furca Alp, August 18-Berm, August 24, 1823', 42–51 (47).
[54] Mrs. E.T Cook, 'Visitors' Books', *Good Words* (1895): 334–40.
[55] *Evening Standard*. Reprinted in *Newcastle Courant*, May 9, 1891.
[56] *Morning Post*, August 28, 1873.

> enriched by sketches innumerable of neighbouring objects of interest and of queer incidents in mountain travel. There were polyglot verses, generally so bad as so be amusing, sometimes so good as to be interesting. There was a running fire of notes, some of them very fierce and very cutting, as to the merits or demerits of particular inns. The entries were often to characteristic that you no longer wondered at the acumen of the persons who profess to judge the character form handwriting, and who may be supposed to base their judgment as much on the thing written as on the calligraphy or cacography itself.[57]

The correspondent eulogised the fanciful remarks and spirit of the age that had produced such literature, as then the

> old *livres des voyageurs* had a special value and interest of their own, and I regret that they are making way for the formal register. In that register, by the way, there is generally a column, about half an inch wide, for 'remarks,' and I observe that if this column is filled at all, which happens very seldom, it is pretty sure to contain a commendation of the inn or an expression of wonder at the smallness of the bill.[58]

Beyond accounting for the vagaries of the tourist market, and changes in proprietorship of inns, which may have influenced the tenor, length, and subject of inscriptions, can we identify a period in which there is such a discernible change, or at least a consciousness of, or even anxiety surrounding, their apparent eclipse become more pronounced? Only a few years after the 1873 piece in the *Morning Post* declared the old forms of the visitors' book in eclipse, the *Saturday Review* declared that '[t]he Visitors' Book lies at the very root of the tourist system, and is not to be reformed away'.[59] To what extent was this process uneven, varying by region, according to the situation, scale, and character of the establishment; in Europe and in Britain, larger hotels assimilated registration within a wider accounting of guests' and employees' movements, revenue, and costs.[60] If contemporaries attributed the decline of the visitors' book to the extinction of the personal interactions associated with 'traditional' forms of hospitality, can the uneven narrative of the visitors' book survival, in whatever form, be understood in terms of changes in the scale and organisation of the commercial accommodation sector, which invites a transnational analysis of tourism's growth? These questions are daunting, but discourses and discursive strategies that we can identify and explore in and outside the visitors' books allow us to begin to tackle them.

Conclusions

A close analysis of the structure, material qualities, and content of the visitors' books, exploring not only the nominal data that they contain but also seeing them as literary sources with specific styles and tropes, can be very profitably integrated with a study of rich contextual material surrounding the books. Together, they highlight the visitors' book role as a vital agent in the articulation of identities, in the evolution of literary styles and tastes, and as a commodity implicated in developing technologies, and systems of book production and distribution. Moreover, the comparative appraisal of

[57]Ibid.
[58]Ibid.
[59]'Visitors' Books', *The Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science, and Art* 48, no. 1247 (20 September 1879): 349–50 (349).
[60]Édouard Guyer, *Les Hôtels Modernes*, trans. Henry Bouriit (Paris: Ve A. Morel et Cie, 1877), 192.

the British and Alpine visitors' books offers a unique opportunity to engage with record-sets that nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century travellers used, and appraised, in tandem. This paper has laid out a research agenda that proceeds from assumptions about British travellers, literary practices, and tastes, and places them at the centre of the culture of the visitors' book, implicitly accepting the assertion that it constitutes a distinctive British 'social institution'.[61] By incorporating a more expansive record-set, we can de-centre the analysis of these sources and investigate the participation of other travellers in nineteenth-century travel cultures and scribal and reading practices. A fuller picture of Swiss travellers in Britain, and their relationship to the visitors' book, would provide an especially welcome addition to such an agenda. So would a history of continental album manufacture and distribution. An ambitious, transnational scholarly undertaking demands a theoretical framework that balances qualitative and quantitative elements, and sensitivity to the particular social, cultural, economic, political, and legal environments in which the visitors' book developed in various jurisdictions. These environments had implications for how the books were used as travellers crossed jurisdictions, and brought their own understandings of the book, and conventions of inscription and reading, with them, as they also were influenced by indigenous textual practices.

Finally, there is optimism to see such a project as advancing partnerships between academia and the private sector. There is perhaps no record-set for the history of hospitality that is more illuminating, more amenable to digitisation, or that can be mobilised to promote the heritage of particular hostelries. Establishing an accurate narrative of institutional development, drawing on historical sources, has become critical to marketing specific establishments, and also to formal accreditation within a number of classification schemes. In so doing, the temptation is to highlight famous visitors and see their signatures as the signal mark of a book's value, much as the nineteenth-century visitor was alleged to have done. But this would be a mistake – reducing the source to a nominal record. The records are more textured, and allow for a deeper analysis of *why* people came to particular regions, and stayed at specific hostelries, on given routes at given times, in addition to asking *who* those people were. The books, and the material written about them, allow us to interrogate the experience of repose as well as travel, of literary and social practices that migrated and intermingled, along with people. They allow us to explore key questions related to the putative divisions between, and chronologies of, manuscript and print cultures, explore how visitors' books relate to the wider constellation of manuscript albums, and interrogate how they were connected to industrial book production – which arguably extended the life, reach, and influence of the album form. A research programme aiming to highlight the complexity of the record-set must find ways of rigorously, systematically, and comparatively engaging with books, aligning questions that interrogate the textual and material properties of manuscript and printed materials. Far from being a collection of names, a record of last resort for historians seeking a substitute for more systematic sources, or a form of ephemera, the visitors' books that survive to us are tools to reconstruct tourist markets, and also records of commercial evolution, intercultural encounter, discursive practice, cultural evaluation, literary cultures, and book history. In a research programme that contextualises their uses,

[61] Kevin James, '"[A] British Social Institution": The Visitors' Book and Hotel Culture in Victorian Britain and Ireland', *Journeys* 13, no. 1 (2012), 42–69.

establishes their instrumentality in economic, social, and cultural historical research, and explores their wider cultural reception, they hold the potential to be of singular historical value.

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