The relationship between writing, writers, and physical places has been much explored and much celebrated. Coffee table books such as *A Writer’s England* and *A Writer’s Ireland* remind us not only of that, but also of the fact that writing has fundamentally shaped and reshaped the way that place and our relationship to place is conceptualized. Although the majority of the millions of visitors who pack England’s Lake District in the summer months may not be aware of it, the area’s popularity, indeed the very concept of the area obviously owe more than a little to the “Lake Poets”. Multibillion-pound business turnovers related more or less directly to Wordsworth – a relationship on which many a philologist must have reflected with irony while his or her engine idled in one of the area’s numerous summer traffic jams. That relationship is recognized specifically and materially at Dove Cottage, the home of William and Dorothy Wordsworth for nine years (1799-1908), and since the late nineteenth century the home of the Wordsworth Trust. Dove Cottage, meticulously maintained, is visited by about 80,000 people annually; its web site gives the traveler directions, a nice guided tour of the cottage, information for school parties, details of the gift shop, even a download of *The Story of Dove Cottage*, a book for elementary-school children. In other words, the museum and its attendant and very significant scholarly institution provide the highbrow (or would-be highbrow) tourist with the opportunity to pay his/her respects to the Lake Poets in situ, and to make a journey back in time characteristic of the British “heritage industry”. To understand some of the cultural significance of the museum, we would have to think about the relationship of the Lake Poets to the Industrial Revolution which created those great northern cities from which the majority of Lake District visitors come (and radically transformed the very landscape of the north of England); about individual tourism in the motor car, which has created both the modern tourist industry in the UK and the modern shape of the Lake District; the cult of pastoral nostalgia so evident in the UK, and so regularly advertised in the US on *Masterpiece Theater*; and about a host of other complex
historical and cultural processes which, while apparently elided in the visit to Dove Cottage, are, in fact instrumental in forming not only context but also the experience of the visit itself. Similar issues would have to be contemplated for analogues to Dove Cottage throughout the UK (with Stratford’s “Shakespeare industry” providing an interesting point of comparison and contrast, and the Brontés’ Howarth an interesting analogue), while much that applies in Britain could also be transferred abroad – for example, to the Circuit Ronsard, proposed by the Michelin guide vert to the Châteaux de la Loire.

In Britain and France writing and landscape are intricately associated, and that association is often particularly marked in the institutions of literary museums and the routes of literary tours.

We should not forget, however, that for the average visitor to Dove Cottage and its British brethren, no visit would be complete without stopping at the shop where, one suspects, the first-rate publications available from the Wordsworth Trust might not be the most commercially successful objects available (“An excellent Shop sells books, gifts and local crafts relating to English literature and the Lake District”, the web site tells us http://www.wordsworth.org.uk/information/index.htm). Indeed, we should not forget that significant amounts of money are also involved in this industry: entry to the Cottage and garden costs approximately $10 for adults, while the web site, inevitably, includes a section entitled “Appeal” (albeit under reconstruction).

In Russia, a country every bit as literary as Britain or France, the relationship between writing and landscape is attenuated – there are no Russian “lake poets”, no writer-made landscapes at all, it might be claimed (though there is the most writerly city in the world, of course, in St Petersburg). And even in today’s Russia the tourist industry is quite different from its Western analogues. Individual tourism still requires a considerable amount of organization on the part of the individual, since so much of the infrastructure taken for granted elsewhere (from good roads to chain hotels or even a network of bed-and-breakfast establishments) is absent, or only present in rudimentary form. Prosperous Russians are much more likely to vacation abroad than at home (as the ubiquitous guide books in Russian at major (and even minor) European tourist
destinations, joining those in English, German, Dutch, Arabic, Japanese, etc, now remind us). Adventurous, but less prosperous Russians do travel through their own country on their own, often packing tents into the back of their generally small cars, and sometimes leaving intriguing accounts on the many web sites devoted to individual tourism. Their accounts often involve remarks about which road signs to ignore, which way to turn in the frequent absence of signs, where a gas station may be found in the provinces, what road hazards to avoid, and where to fix your wheel fixed if you don’t avoid a hazard. Less adventurous (and less prosperous) Russian continue to rely on default solutions such as the country cottage (dacha, often serving as modest vacation cabin and simultaneously as site of essential vegetable garden), or the group vacation in a “Sanatorium”.

Not, it would seem, a country for equivalents of Dove Cottage or the circuit Ronsard. And, sure enough, Russian literary museums often have relatively little in common with these two western examples of literary tourism. But what they do have over their British and French brethren is numbers and distribution. The main internet catalogue of Russian museums, the good but incomplete www.museum.ru, lists 246 with the profile “literary”, while Anna Benn and Rosamund Bartlett’s Literary Russia: a Guide (London, 1997), devoted at least in part to literary museums (it does also list significant literary addresses, even if no museum can be found at a given address) is nearly five-hundred pages long.

The museum web site, to take a prominent example, lists no fewer than thirteen museums associated with Russia’s most revered writer, Pushkin, from the large and significant museums of Saint Petersburg and Moscow (each city has two) to his “dacha museum” in Leningrad oblast’, the house where the family of his much-celebrated nurse lived, and the house where one of his famous characters might have lived (had he been an historical personage). The most significant museums have archival sections, house major conferences and publish interesting almanacs. They are associated with long periods in his life, with his death, with his family – for example, the main Moscow museum, the Memorial Apartment in Petersburg, the museums on the estates at Mikhailovskoe and Boldino. Others are rather different, and more revealing of the specifics of the culture of the Russian literary museum. The dacha is described thus:
Uniqueness of the Pushkin dacha museum is unique principally because it is a real wooden house, preserved by time and fate, with walls that remember Pushkin. In this house… Pushkin lived from May to October 1831…

Extract:

This house has been associated with the life of Pushkin’s nurse Arina Rodionovna, her family and descendents, for over two centuries. … Here is reproduced the décor of a peasant house from the end of the eighteenth and beginning of the nineteenth centuries. This museum was created by the love of the people, all its exhibits are gifts from admirers of the great Russian poet.

The “Stationmaster’s House” (after the eponymous hero of Pushkin’s “The Stationmaster” in his Tales of Belkin) is equally striking, as described:

Это первый в нашей стране музей литературного героя. Музей создан по повести А.С.Пушкина "Станционный смотритель" и архивным документам, и находится в сохранившемся здании Вырской почтовой станции. История станции начинается в 1800
Extract

This is the first museum of a literary hero in our house. The museum was created according to Pushkin’s “Stationmaster” and archival documents, and is in the building of the Vyra post station….The museum conducts a lot of mass-cultural work; it houses literary evenings, poetry celebrations, and Pushkin symposia.

The Dostoevsky museum in St Petersburg publishes a booklet called Seven Dostoevsky Museums (seven against thirteen, but then, as they say, “Pushkin is our all”), describing the author’s museums across the territory of the former Soviet Union. Most are predictable – the Petersburg museum itself, in the apartment where he died; a museum in the apartment of the Mariinsky Hospital in Moscow, where he was born and grew up; a museum on the family estate at Darovoe; a museum where he was imprisoned in Omsk (although the prison itself is long gone); the house in Staraya Russa where the family summered several times in the late 1870s, and which contributed to The Brothers Karamazov, and so on. But at least one is slightly surprising – in Novokuznetsk, where the author spent a total of two weeks (getting married).

Most of the museums described so far were created in the Soviet era, and to the naïve observer (at least, to this naïve observer) it seemed that they were purely official institutions, largely associated with propaganda and indoctrination, reeking of an institutional cult of particular writers, and surely doomed to disappear if ever the Soviet Union ceased to exist. How wrong that naïve observer turned out to be. Russia’s literary museums have easily outlasted the Soviet Union, and, indeed, have multiplied in the post-Soviet era. The count from the www.museum.ru is certainly short (it doesn’t even include such branch museums as the Dostoevsky museum in Novokuznetsk, which is under the aegis of, but structurally quite separate from, the city’s Museum of History, nor does it include amateur and private institutions), and the numbers are growing regularly, despite the fact that state subsidies are now very small and that the direct state
Michael Makin, “Secular Pilgrimage in the New Russia: The Life and Meaning of the Literary Museum” – draft, do not circulate or quote without permission

propaganda element in the presentation of literature has more or less disappeared from education and from culture in general.

As the examples cited indicate, literary museums run from the central and obviously significant, to the very remote and relatively minor. Most combine professional work (by curators, scholars, artists, and others) with the efforts of amateur enthusiasts and collectors; most, even the very small ones, are home to various events and celebrations, regularly welcome school parties, may produce publications (some quite significant). In these respects they are, *mutatis mutandis*, rather similar to their western equivalents (although the consequences may be quite different – as, for example, in the intersection of professional and amateur work – our naïve observer should have remembered how many soldier-poets wrote to the Mayakovsky museum in Moscow during the Second World War – on that museum, see Chantal Sundaram, “Manufacturing Culture: The Soviet State and the Mayakovsky Legend”, Unpublished Ph. D. dissertation, University of Toronto, 1999). In the Soviet period, as with every other area of culture, official museums had shadow counterparts for less officially favored authors, where amateur (and professional) enthusiasts and scholars collected materials and expressed dissent. Major campaigns were sometimes waged to create official museums for troubling authors (as in the case of the Peredelkino Pasternak museum). What was said, and what wasn’t said in exhibitions and by the very creation of museums was, of course, also highly significant.

In the Soviet period, the ideological intricacies were evident. But Russia’s literary museums would also seem to serve other purposes. For example, in a country where repeated violent change has left so little of the fabric of the everyday life of the past accessible, and where, until recently, museums in general did relatively little to create the heritage-industry-style illusion of the past (think of those stunning outdoor museums of wooden architecture, where the interiors of remarkable wooden churches and houses are nearly always empty), literary museums offered and still offer the visitor the opportunity to visit the fabric of the past – even if that fabric often resembles the scattered remains of a shipwreck. And in a country so almost fervently textual, what better way to get at the ordinary life of the past than through the far from ordinary writing and writers of the past? In the case of the provincial, sometimes very provincial, literary
museums which dot the Russian landscape from the renamed village of Lomonosovo in the Archangel oblast’, where can be found the Historico-memorial Lomonosov Museum, on the site where once stood the house in which the great scientist and poet grew up (open every day except Friday, but by prior arrangement – a common régime for the more remote examples) to the museum “Chekhov and Sakhalin”, some ten time zones away on Russia’s Pacific rim, other forces also seem to be at work. It is more important, it would seem in some cases, that the museum exists, than that it is overwhelmed with visitors. It represents an assertion of local identity within the context of national culture – Lomonosov came from here, Chekhov spent the best part of a year interviewing convicts and exiles here.

Thus, we find that quite a lot of very carefully and professionally tended museums are hardly ever open. A good example would be the Klyuev museum in the small town of Vytegra, near the southern tip of Lake Onega. The Director of the Vytegra Local History Museum, of which the Klyuev museum is an affiliate, notes that the presence of the museum is widely advertised (noted in tourist guides and on the Museum’s billboards, but that few tourists actually ask for a tour).

Other literary museums, however, are the object of major tourist and similar expeditions. The Esenin Park and Museum on the River Oka in the village of Konstantinovo, where the poet was born and grew up, claims 151,000 visitors a year, and is the end point of some of the shorter cruises south from Moscow’s river port (for example, R15,000 ($500) for two people on a three-day Moscow-Konstantinovo-Moscow cruise on the good ship Alexander Nevsky this summer, if you want the Luxury Suite, a mere R3,500 for a single, perhaps misnamed, “deluxe” cabin, that comes only with a wash basin -- [http://www.vip-tours.ru/zip_xls/3days.xls](http://www.vip-tours.ru/zip_xls/3days.xls). The Esenin complex at Konstantinovo has several virtues, including more or less “authentic” buildings, in contrast to the Moscow Esenin museum, which was re-constructed on the territory of a third-world country’s embassy, and, as of 1994, contained no authentic artifacts.

If there is one thing that the Anglophone reader knows about Russia’s literary museums, it is probably that the Tolstoi park and museum on the family estate at Yasnaya Polyana in Tula oblast’, which claims an average of 110,000 visitors a year, is the
favorite spot for local newly-weds to leave their wedding bouquet – in this part of the world, Tolstoy’s grave, on the estate, seems preferred over the default choice elsewhere of a city war memorial. What most casual followers of Russia’s Tolstoy cult will not know is that the website for the town of Yasnaya Polyana, some 200 km south of Moscow, offers a “tourist route” from Moscow to the estate and back in five days, which takes in Chekhov’s house at Melikhovo, Turgenev’s at Spasskoe-Lutovinovo, one of the lesser Tsvetayaev museums (at Tarusa), and another Tolstoy site, as well as the Yasnaya Polyana museum, and provides the names of three agencies which will provide these tours, as well as the cost of every museum, hotel, and tourist bus rental by the hour (http://www.yasnayapolyana.ru/tourism/programs/index.htm, despite the link, the “English version is not ready yet”).

Clearly, the bigger museums are very much on the tourist map. They also come up frequently in the personal accounts of tourism found everywhere on the Russian internet and referred to above. Perhaps one example will suffice – the website of the journal Road and Traveler (Put’i voditel’; http://autotravel.ru/) offers not only such appealing destinations as Monaco, but also a more modest weekend trip from Moscow to Turgenev’s Spasskoe-Lutovinovo (http://autotravel.ru/2003/11/routes/spasskoe/index.html). The author, Aleksandr Sagatovskii, tells us that the route is simple – take Highway M2 (for the Crimea), pass Tula, watch for the bumps and the traffic in the summer, and don’t go past the sign for the Museum – but, he tells us, it’s hard to miss (not surprisingly, since the museum website informs us that Turgenev’s home claims 120,000 visitors a year). Mtsensk was a miserable place to stay overnight after respects were duly paid to Turgenev, but Tula provided an adequate hotel (found with the help of local taxi drivers). Don’t take that short cut back via Kozel’sk on R92, though, he warns, if you have a lightweight foreign car – despite what the map tells you, it’s only fit for trucks and 4X4s, although his little Fiat survived with no damage. A six-hundred km two-day trip to visit a literary museum (the only stop described in his narrative, apart from the hotel in Tula (overnight parking in guarded lot, R30; keep ear plugs for the local street racers outside the hotel, who make it sound like Moscow by night).
These few examples suggest how well and diversely integrated into the new Russia are the country’s remarkably numerous literary museums, most of them inherited from the old Russia of the Soviet period, but some newly created. Striking are the different forms of integration, and stunning the range of popularity (from numbers that well outstrip Wordsworth, even in Russia’s provinces – much more inaccessible to a capital-city visitor than England’s Lake District is to London, let alone Manchester – to numbers that just about stagger into four figures – three thousand for that remote Lomonosov museum, six-thousand for the quite accessible Klychkov museum near Taldom north of Moscow (but one suspects many of them are enforced school visitors), and a similar number for Chekhov on distant Sakhalin – and numbers that only accumulate at all for professional gatherings, as at the Klyuev museum during the annual Klyuev symposium in Vytegra).

That these museums, large and small, feature on tourist itineraries, in guide books, and in amateur accounts is very telling about the ways in which literature and the culture-around-literature function in Russia. Literary museums are certainly obligatory stops for many visitors. I ran into an elderly man and his nephew at the Tsvetaeva Museum in Moscow – a very popular site nowadays (opened with great fanfare in 1990; interior paint all acrylic, but lovingly presented as a typical eccentric house for the Arbat area of the city in the nineteenth century; claims 25,000 visitors, mostly rather pious, and certainly not looking for a garden tour (there is none, just Tsvetaeva relics)); the two were from Vladivostok – nine time zones away – and the nephew was on his first visit to the capital. When we started talking, and the elderly man realized that the Museum had published a book of mine, the nephew was summoned to “meet an author”, and business cards were duly exchanged – presumably, the visit had provided some extra exotica. I wish I had asked how many other of Moscow’s numerous literary museums they planned to visit.

Above all, what these literary museums – shrines to authors – seem to recall is an important analogue from the pre-Soviet past, an analogue that generated ample and intriguing travel narratives and, by the beginning of the twentieth century, some substantial and interesting guide books. What the pair from Vladivostok and so many other visitors seem to call to mind is latter-day pilgrims (in a country where religious pilgrimage thrives again, incidentally), since the museums themselves are shrines, and
part of a complex nexus of local and national ties and identities, professional and amateur
cults, associations of past and present, material and spiritual, life and text.

But don’t forget your spare tire.

Michael Makin, Dexter, Michigan, April 2004.

Paper also available at: http://www-personal.umich.edu/~mlmakin/RussLitMuseum.pdf

Web version of PowerPoint presentation at:
http://www-personal.umich.edu/~mlmakin/LitMuseumsWeb.ppt