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*Beyond the Author's House:  
The Potential for Participatory Storytelling in  
General Literary Museums*

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## AUTHOR'S DECLARATION

I declare that, except where explicit reference is made to the contribution of others, that this dissertation is the result of my own work and has not been submitted for any other degree at the University of Glasgow or any other institution.

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## PREFACE

*“Tús maith leath na hoibre: a good start is half the work”* – Irish proverb

*“Academic writing conventionally eschews any suggestion that it emerges from a particular body, place, and time” unlike “other sorts of writing and reading that do elicit the desire in their readers to date and locate them more fully”*

– Watson, 2020, p. 21

In the spirit of acknowledging the close relationship between place and writing, here is a list of the major locations where I wrote my dissertation:

- San Ġwann, Malta
- Glasgow, Scotland
  - 1099 Argyle Street
  - University of Glasgow Library
  - John McCune Smith Building
  - Mille Café & The Alchemy Experiment
  - Kelvingrove Park
- Princes Risborough, England
- London, England
- Vancouver Island and Abbotsford, Canada

## **ABSTRACT**

This study explores the evolving role of literary museums, traditionally synonymous with writers' house museums, which have historically romanticised authors' lives, acted as markers of education for the elite, and almost exclusively been designed for tourists. The research, focused primarily on the UK and Ireland, examines how in contrast, general literary museums are overlooked cultural assets, demonstrating shifts from passive exhibits toward dynamic, future-focused spaces that foster participatory storytelling, lifelong learning, and wellbeing. Addressing the limitations of treating visitors as observers only, this study asks how literary museums can serve as tools for social action and creativity, empowering audiences to participate in the process. Previous research explores these tensions in relation to literary tourism as well as museums more broadly. Through case studies of the Glasgow Women's Library and the Museum of Literature Ireland, this research highlights how these two museums utilise storytelling and multipurpose use of space to create inclusive, collaborative learning environments. The findings suggest that literary museums have the capacity to engage and merge traditional and contemporary forms of literacy, empower marginalised voices and contribute to a more inclusive narrative. This work is significant for museum educators and policymakers to realise the potential of literary museums as post-museum spaces, not only engaged with the past but also supporting future generations of critical thinkers, writers and storytellers.

### **Keywords**

Literary Museums    Narrative    Participation    Storytelling    Post-Museum

Lifelong Learning    Glasgow Women's Library    Museum of Literature Ireland

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Literary museums have traditionally been considered synonymous with writers' house museums; Western cultural phenomena and places of pilgrimage "for the educated and literate" which romanticise and mystify the life and belongings of the author, while contributing explicitly and implicitly to national identity (Young, 2015, p. 230; Watson, 2020). The important tasks of preserving and conserving their collections as well as memorialising authors, makes them cultural and economic assets, but the almost exclusive focus on tourists as their audiences do not necessarily make them sustainable or future focused. Less acknowledged forms of literary museums have and continue to emerge to critically engage with and expand the scope of this museum subset. Their aim being not only to serve as exhibit and archival spaces but also as libraries and workshop hosts which encourage collaborative learning, creativity, social action, and recurring engagement rather than only one-time visits. Such museums have the potential to bridge the tangible and intangible elements of storytelling, the lives of authors, characters, and readers alike, imagination, identity, oral tradition, and the written word. This vast scope of purpose finds expression in Orhan Pamuk's *Modest Manifesto for Museums* (2013), in which he calls for the measurement of a museum's success to be made by "its capacity to reveal the humanity of individuals" and their ability to "honour" the surrounding neighbourhood rather than to "dominate" it (para. 15). As places rooted in narrative and literacy, literary museums have significant tools at their disposal, are well suited to Pamuk's people-centred call to action, and can be future thinking by empowering community members to be creative and share their own stories, especially those who are marginalised and may not historically have had a voice in museum spaces.

### 1. Problem Statement

Research, although minimal, has been conducted and contested on the limitations writers' house museums pose in terms of engaging audiences and representation as explored by Lisa Junkin Lopez (2015), Hilary Iris Lowe (2015), Linda Young (2015; 2018), Ian Jenkins (2019), Nathaniel Prottas (2020), and Nicola J. Watson (2020). In response, this study will address the issue of treating visitors as passive guests rather than prioritising their empowerment (Falk, 2009; Anderson, 2023). In order to give the research manageable limits, the study covers the United Kingdom which has a high density of writers' house museums, and the Republic of Ireland which has a rich legacy

of storytellers and writers (Fletcher et al., 2018; Britannica, 2024, June 4). Even more specifically, Scotland and Ireland have UNESCO Literary Cities (Edinburgh and Dublin), a signifier which recognises their contributions to literature on an international scale, as well as appeals to each country's literary consciousness. Conducting case studies on the Glasgow Women's Library and the Museum of Literature Ireland provide insight into these contexts while bringing awareness to more general literary museum spaces, the first being the only accredited UK museum, archives, and library focused on women's history, and the second a relatively new museum in the heart of Dublin with university and library partnerships.

## **2. Justification and Purpose**

The museum sector is undergoing significant change, driven by the need to navigate increasingly diverse and polarised societies, as well as recovering in the wake of COVID-19 (Walsh, et al, 2019; Anderson, 2023) which UNESCO describes as "the worst disruption to education in a century" (UNESCO, 2024, para. 1). Reading for pleasure has both mental and physical health benefits (du Sautoy, 2021) and can be encouraged and celebrated as a pastime on this point alone, but there is also an urgent need for spaces that foster critical thinking and digital literacy in a time when forms of communication and learning are evolving at immense speed. Researching literary museums is crucial because they serve as a bridge between preserving, celebrating, and critiquing literature in its traditional sense and also engaging with literacy as liberation or agency; empowering visitors to contribute to the conversation and to develop the skills to critically manoeuvre through the media they consume, whether online, the news, or social media (UNESCO, 2024, para. 3). There is also a need for literary museums to look beyond the canon to include more diverse narratives, including the experiences of women, youth, the working class, refugees, migrants, and others, while considering what it means to be a "multi-tongued, multi-ethnic community" (Prottas, 2020, p. 277). As Chinua Achebe reflects, "Until the lion learns to write, the story of the hunt shall forever glorify the hunter" (1958)" (qtd. in Abungu, 2023, p. 14). My objective in conducting qualitative case studies on Glasgow Women's Library (GWL) and Museum of Literature Ireland (MoLI) is twofold: first, to understand and bring awareness to the vast and evolving educational and social potential of literary museums, and second, to advocate for their role in empowering future writers and storytellers. This research will benefit not only literary museum

educators and policy writers by highlighting their work but also the communities who are impacted by the museum's policies.

### **3. Research Questions**

The question guiding my research is: *How do general literary museums utilise narrative and space to engage visitors in participatory storytelling?* My supporting question seeks to explore the visions and decisions which led to current practices, specifically: *How do literary museum staff understand and implement policies that are participatory or co-creative?* In my aim to answer these questions I have investigated the history of literary heritage within the broader Western context, recent scholarship on the shifting internal and external expectations of museums as public spaces, and theoretical frameworks such as lifelong learning, the post-museum, and participatory practices. Onsite observations and interviews with GWL and MoLI staff were informed by these theories, creating the foundation for first-hand empirical insights on the broad scope of the museum subset, including how they are adapting to contemporary needs.

### **4. Organisation of Paper**

Chapter 2 will explore the history of literary museums in relation to museums more generally, followed by a review of literature pertaining to theories of space and education. Methodology, including an overview of the topic development, descriptions of the research sites, methods, role of the researcher, and assumptions and limitations of the study, will be covered in Chapter 3. The Results and Analysis of the qualitative data collected at the research sites will be detailed in Chapter 4, after which my Interpretations and Conclusion will be covered in Chapters 5 and 6. Relevant Appendices are included after the conclusion and referenced throughout the paper when appropriate.

## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **1. Introduction**

In 2022 (August 24), the Extraordinary General Assembly of the International Council of Museums (ICOM) decided, after much debate (Lehmannová, 2020), on a new definition of museums. It states that:

“A museum is a not-for-profit, permanent institution in the service of society that researches, collects, conserves, interprets and exhibits

tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. They operate and communicate ethically, professionally and with the participation of communities, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection, and knowledge sharing.”

The additions of “diversity” and “sustainability”, along with a broadened sense of education and leadership with the inclusions of “participation of communities” and “knowledge sharing” mirrors the shift of museological and pedagogical theory and practice in recent decades towards the empowerment of individuals and communities to contribute to and co-create in informal learning spaces. As a subset, literary museums, while not always the quintessential “museum” whose main priority is preserving and displaying items of historical importance, is a vast category with a large audience (Watson, 2020, p. 7). They provide a unique study on the spectrum of participatory policies and practice within the field.

A General Literary Museum is defined by the ICOM International Committee of Literary and Composers’ Museums (ICLCM) (2019, May 2), as:

“Museums about a geographical defined literature, a special genre of literature or about literature and written/spoken word in general. It can also include institutions with special collections of books and manuscripts that are treated in a museological way” (para. 7).

Most research on the literary museum subset, however, is focused on writers’ house museums which are maintained to educate visitors on the life of an author whose work is deemed of national significance, while simultaneously celebrating the location where that author was born, lived for any length of time, or died. Examples in the UK include Shakespeare’s Birthplace Museum, Jane Austen’s House Museum, and the Brontë Parsonage Museum. It can also be the house in the fictional life of a literary figure, such as 221B Baker Street, London, the residence of the detective Sherlock Holmes, created by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (ICLCM, 2019; Fletcher et al., 2018). Described as “astonishingly persistent” as a museum type (Young, 2015, p. 229), there are estimated to be approximately fifty writers’ house museums in the UK alone (Fletcher, et al., 2018) which are bolstered by the film and TV industry when adaptations of authors’ books or lives are produced and are often now reliant on such publicity (Watson, 2020). Alex Lainsbury (2019) suggests that the reason “there has been little research” on the impacts

of more general literary hubs is because “‘soft’ benefits that improve quality of life” including literacy and “enhancement of cultural awareness and outreach services” are difficult to quantify (p. 153). Nicola Watson (2020) suggests more harshly that the fault lies with the “museologists and museum practitioners” who “are exceptional in treating them [literary museums] generically” (p. 7). Certainly, using the word “general” when referring officially to literary museums implies broad scope while complicating our understanding of and ability to describe their purpose, and few qualitative studies have been conducted on them.

In response, by determining the history of, relationship between, and differences of general literary museums and writers house museums, it will then be possible to critically delve into the social theories of placemaking and collaborative learning and how they have and may be applied in this subset of museums. Orhan Pamuk’s (2013) call for the success of museums to be measured by their “capacity to reveal the humanity of individuals” rather than by their ability to represent a nation or even a “particular history” finds alignment with general literary museums policies and practice as will be discussed in Chapters 4-5 (para. 6). They address the “duality” of intangible and tangible elements of narrative in a way house museums often do not or cannot by intentionally merging literary heritage with contemporary “cultural landscape” (Strepetova & Arcos-Pumarola, 2020, p. 107) and “social concerns” (Prottas, 2020, p. 221) thus acting as enriching cultural assets, invaluable multipurpose spaces and resources for sustainable learning and creativity.

## **2. Literary Museums: A History**

At first glance, Orhan Pamuk’s call for neighbourhood-based, “smaller museums”, interested in individual, human stories, make writers’ house museums seem the ideal format, but like the museum sector as a whole, writers’ house museums have colonial roots and are steeped in class politics. They began in and continue to have a “particularly strong representation in Europe” although no comprehensive record of such museums has been created (Prottas, 2020, p. 221; Candlin, 2008). Their prevalence is due in part to literature being at the “roots of modern-day tourism” beginning in the 1700s and 1800s, through the Greek classics, travel writing, histories, and novels that inspired and accompanied young, privileged men on their coming-of-age Grand Tour through Europe (Jenkins, 2019b, p. 11; Baleiro, 2023). Writers were some of the most renowned

celebrities at the same time that books were becoming more widely available to the public (Watson, 2020, p. 8). Scottish author Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832), who is attributed as the inventor of historical fiction (Britannica, August 11), designed his estate, Abbotsford, with romanticised, theatrical intent, knowing that it would eventually be opened to the public and associated with his novels (Fletcher et al, 2018). French novelist and playwright Alexandre Dumas' (1802-1870) estate is another example of life mimicking art as he had it designed to reflect his novels, even naming it Château de Monte-Cristo after one of his title characters (Britannica, July 20). Other writers' homes, especially in the UK, were musealised posthumously in the early twentieth century by upper middle-class "energetic voluntary committees" who purchased the private homes in order to preserve them (Fletcher et al, 2018, p. 174).

The consistent language used by researchers to describe how people have and continue to engage with this subgenre of museum is religious in tone. The writers' home is "mystified", with tourists arriving on "faith-inspired pilgrimage" to the "shrine" or "cult" of the author, to see the "relics" of their life and writing (Watson, 2020, p. 1; Young, 2015, pp. 230-232). Objects owned by the writer which also figure in the fictional world they created carry special significance as relics, and the birthplaces of authors take on especially sacred quality similar to the Christian nativity (Watson, 2020, p. 12; Fletcher et al., 2018). "Pilgrimage" also suggests a journey from a distance and thus seem to favour the experience of the tourist, although authors are also framed as "heroes" representative of the creativity and intelligence of their nation, and thus often subjects of pride for the surrounding community (Young, 2018, p. 165). In fact, there are accounts of pilgrimages being made as far back as the 1500s to the home of poet and foundational Renaissance figure, Francesco Petrarch (Baleiro, 2023). Visiting a writers' house museum has thus for centuries had the potential to be a moving experience for individual readers as they symbolically connect with an author and also collectively engage in an element of the "national imagination" (Watson, 2020; Young, 2015, p. 230). Issues arise because such spaces traditionally present authors as "models of pure artistic genius", creating an environment that encourages unquestioning awe which in turn limits critical thinking and conversation around the individual's life and work (Prottas, 2020, p. 221).

In *The Author's Effects: On Writer's House Museums* (2020), Nicola J. Watson, an essential source on the topic, argues that "a writer's house museum collapses different times into a single space", but I would counter that by being "designed to 'effect' a figure

of the author” (p. 4) they are created to transport the visitor into the time in question, as if the writer has only just stepped out of the room, rather than succeeding in merging times. In *Beyond the Cult of the Author* (2020), Nathaniel Prottas takes this further, stating that writers’ house museums are “old-fashioned, dusty homes”; a conjuring of rooms, featuring portraits, furniture, letters, and household items “frozen in time” with a “fetishistic aura” (p. 221). Watson (2020) is herself critical of the Cabinet of Curiosity approach at the Writers’ Museum in Edinburgh, Scotland which explores the lives of Sir Walter Scott, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Robert Burns with a “beguilingly indigestible mix of dislocated personalia” (p. 12). The harshness of these statements could be argued as overly zealous given that the draw and success of writers’ house museums is in their very “old-fashioned”, time capsule quality, but the issue being addressed by these authors is their risk of irrelevance to society and of perpetuating elitist views of literature, designed primarily for those already familiar with the author in question, and serving as “distinction-markers for the educated” (Young, 2015, p. 230; Lund, 2019, p. 13). In *Open House: Reimagining the Historic House Museum*, Lisa Junkin Lopez (2015) also uses terms relating to time and subsequently death. She equates the ropes placed in writers’ house museums to keep visitors along a set path or out of certain rooms, to “sticking a pin through an insect” and putting it on display: “Once they are devoid of the people who animated them in the first place, domestic spaces tend to become mausoleums – meaningful in their permanence, but petrified and lifeless in their presentation” and only engaging to a few (p. 10).

The history of the presence of barriers in museums, prioritisation of sight as the means of education, and elitism are explored by Fiona Candlin in *Museums, Modernity and the Class Politics of Touching Objects* (2008). Candlin agrees with earlier research which correlates “modern notions of observation” with the nineteenth century “equation of touch with ‘primitive cultures’” (a colonial construct) but argues that there was also overt distinctions being made between different classes (p. 9). Heritage sites and museums originally restricted access of the working class and general public through exclusive opening hours, ticketing processes, and prices (p. 12). For example, the British Museum required an application, references, and long waits (Candlin, 2008). As museums in the UK slowly began to open to people from the lower classes in the 1830s due to the work of reformers, they were refused the same freedom as the upper classes (Candlin, 2008). The latter had “license to touch” objects on display “and their touch was deemed

rational and non-damaging” (p. 9) whereas the touch and even the “stare” from the former was considered “vulgar”, dirty, and an expression of unruly emotion, described in 1841 by upper-class visitor, Anna Jameson, as the “flirting” of “loungers and loiterers” (qtd in Candlin, 2008, p. 11). In consequence, touch in museums slowly became prohibited and remains a policy in most museums to this day (Candlin, 2008). As upholders of these restrictions, writers’ house museums “are not innocent” or passive buildings but retain and must address these “status dynamics”, just as the authority and purpose of museums as a whole are currently and should continue to be deconstructed (Lopez, 12; Fletcher et al, 2018, p. 168; Young, 2015)

In contrast to Orhan Pamuk’s *Modest Manifesto for Museums*, Lisa Stone, in *Playing House/Museum* (2015), pessimistically labels “house museum” as an “oxymoron” or a merging of private and public worlds in which the latter will always override the former (p. 28). Lopez is of the opinion, however, that despite there being sporadic research, there is evidence of writers’ house museums “reimagining” the relationship of the visitor with the writer in question (Lopez, 2015, p. 10). Both Lowe and Prottas argue that “breaking the house museum’s traditional *Romantic* mode” (Lowe, 2015, p. 45) and challenging the presentation of “authors as national heroes” (Prottas, 2020, p. 221) can go a long way toward “arming history tourists with the skills to understand, challenge, and think critically about the past” (Lowe 45). “Understood as an open artwork, literature transforms and shifts as new readers engage with books, poems, plays, and epistolary works; the writers’ intention provides only part of the work’s meaning” (Prottas, 2020, p. 221). Lowe provides the example of important work being done in an exhibit at the Emily Dickinson Museum in Amherst, Massachusetts, USA. It explores Dickinson’s creative process including how she regularly listed alternative words for a verse of her poetry which were only chosen by publishers after her death. The exhibit is presented as “choosing your own adventure” in which visitors can physically flip between the words and see the meaning of the poem change (Lowe, 46). It subsequently explores how Emily Dickinson as we know her today has been “invented” in many ways “by editors, mythmakers, and English teachers” and invites visitors to “remake her” and consider what it means for the work of authors to take on a life of their own (Lowe, 2015, p. 46). Instead of framing the writer, their work, and their past as complete or above reproach, their past home becomes a place to explore their creative process and humanity as experienced,

interpreted and recorded by an individual, an approach which is more in keeping with Orhan Pamuk's idea of the home (2013).

The question is how do these dynamics manifest in general literary museums? While writers' house museums are under-researched, there is even less information available on general literary museums (Lopez, 2015). In fact, there is no evidence that they are recognized as a defined subset outside of ICOM. The University for Foreigners of Perugia, Italy has created the Centre for Research on Literary Tourism (TULE) which includes an e-dictionary of relevant and invaluable topics (R. Capurro, personal communication, March 24, 2024). With fifty-four entries as of 23 July 2024, it is consistently being contributed to and peer-reviewed by various academics, but despite having submissions covering everything from "Epistolary Form: Personal Letters", to "Literary Landscapes", "Literature, Pilgrimage and Religious Tourism", and "Literary Tourism" by country, there is no mention of the word "general" (Baleiro, R., Capecchi, G. & Arcos-Pumarola (Orgs.), n.d.). The broad submission "Literary Museums", however, does cover and significantly expands on many of the same subsets, including national and regional literary museums (e.g. Museum of Literature Ireland in Dublin), library literary museums (e.g. Glasgow Women's Library), museums dedicated to one book (e.g. The Museum of Innocence in Istanbul, Turkey), genre museums (e.g. The National Leprechaun Museum in Dublin), children's literature museums (e.g. The Story Museum in Oxford, England), and literary eco-museums (the Lake District) (Baleiro, 2023).

Museums of national literature are "not the most widespread" and difficult to identify as they are not often independent entities but rather housed within or associated with libraries or universities (Capurro, 2023). Examples in Europe include the permanent exhibition, Grāmata Latvija, in Riga at the National Library of Latvia, and the Literature Museum in Vienna at the National Library of Austria. Being "deeply interconnected with archives and libraries", as noted by Capurro (para. 2), reflects the "rise in cultural agency collaborations" recognised by Deanna Marcum in 2014 (p. 78). Ultimately, it is not a matter of "general" literary museums being "better" than writers' house museums, and neither is it about the latter being redundant as argued by various researchers (Stone, 2015, p. 2015). There is evidence of actions being taken to make writers' homes more accessible and engaging, as explored by Lowe (2015), but I would argue that writers house museums have limited audiences by their very nature as shrines and focus on conserving and

displaying a protected heritage house. Other forms of literary museums have greater freedom to prioritise the return visitor and diversify content (Lopez 2015; Capurro, 2023).

### **3. Space and Place**

While Pamuk states that “the future of museums is inside our own homes”, he clarifies that he is not calling for the removal of national or community museums (2013, para. 12). Linda Young (2015) would argue that the home is not equipped “for the larger mission of museum knowledge production” (p. 230), however as explored in the section above, any museum, including house museums can become sterile, uninviting places if not designed with the future in mind. Instead, Pamuk’s call, at its most basic level, can be interpreted as investing in places which serve an intimate, daily, lived-in purpose rather than “dead” spaces, shrines, or simply collections of curiosities. The term “third place” or “space” was coined by Ray Oldenberg in the 1980s to describe a place of social engagement outside both the private home and the public workplace (Hickman, 2013; Morse, 2021; Grodach, 2010). It is rooted in the belief that “social interaction at the neighbourhood level enhances residents’ quality of life” especially for those in deprived areas (Hickman, 2013, p. 222) and that such places reach their fullest potential when they are “appropriated by [the community] as their own” for fun, networking, and support (Oldenberg qtd. in Hickman, 2013, p. 223). In many ways, an extension of the home. While Oldenberg’s theory lacked the support of empirical data, other researchers have since addressed and filled in the gaps, but even so, a sense of place and feelings of belonging in connection to specific spaces “are difficult to measure” (Sandell, 2007, p. 95). More recently, lockdowns during the COVID-19 pandemic forced many “third places” to move temporarily online, creating new urgency in the development of digital forms of engagement as social and economic struggles were exacerbated (Child, 2021; Valencia-Forrester & Stewart, 2022). Post-pandemic, the borders between home and the workplace are less distinct, and the digital landscape remains an integral and constantly developing part of society for both work and leisure with the potential to both hinder and create opportunities for interaction with others (Hickman, 2013; Child, 2021). Libraries were included in Oldenberg’s list of potential “third places” but not museums, but the concept can be closely linked to “post-museum” spaces, reflecting the shift in museological practices, although not necessarily cultural perceptions, in the last fifty years (Anderson, 2023).

“Post-museum” can be defined as a movement away from thinking of the museum as a “repository of material culture” towards seeing them as a “process of cultural exchange” through experience, dialogue, and narrative, all of which are integral to the general literary museum experience (Watermeyer, 2012, p. 3). In 2007, Eileen Hooper-Greenhill already speculated that “the exhibition will become one among many other forms of communication” in the post-museum space, including “workshops, performances, dances, songs, and meals” (Museums and their Communities, p. 81). She imagined “establishments of community and organisational partnerships”; engaging in “the production of objects during educational programmes which then enter the collections”; prioritising “periods of time when specific community groups use the museum spaces in their own way”; supporting “writers, scientists and artists in residence”, and featuring “satellite displays in pubs and shops” (Museums and their Communities, p. 81). In *Reinventing the Museum* (2023), Gail Anderson frames this shift through an assessment tool for museums to help them determine where they stand between traditional and reinvented museum approaches including from “destination” to “integral”, from “patriarchal” to “intersectional”, from “belief that museums are neutral” to “neutrality is non-existent”, from “safeguarding” to “welcoming”, and from “established” to “learning”, among many others (p. 7). In the same anthology, George Okello Abungu (2023) states that the “museum definition must...be fluid” in order to best serve and celebrate “societal diversity”; spaces that are able to take on varying forms based on each community’s needs (p. 14).

As noted, however, shifts in operations do not immediately assuage the public’s internalised views of museums. For many, the conscious or unconscious knowledge that museums have historically been exclusive centres for the affluent and educated creates a psychological barrier, or “threshold fear” as explored by Nuala Morse in *The Museum as a Space of Social Care* (2021, p. 135) and by Elaine Heumann Gurian in *Reshaping Museums Space* (2005). Gurian’s (2005) conclusion is that broadening audiences is often an unrealistically optimistic goal given a plethora of variables including the museum’s architecture which has traditionally been imposing, potentially limited access to transportation, and competition for people’s time. One of the elements of threshold fear to be addressed by museums, for example, is assumptions of behaviour required upon entering the museum. In speaking of literary tourism specifically, Alex Lainsbury (2019) suggests that the draw of libraries as destinations should be that they are “the ultimate

quiet space” (p. 152) and similarly, Ian Jenkins (2019a) calls them “safe, silent spaces” contrasting them with other cultural venues and urban life (p. 102). While well intentioned, it reveals that both writers have unquestioningly accepted silence as the correct behaviour for literary spaces. Museums, like libraries, have traditionally enforced similar expectations. For example, in the presence of Michelangelo’s Statue of David, in June 2023, gallery attendants regularly hushed any visitors who started speaking (personal visit). Silent or quiet contemplation along with the performative expectations of looking at objects from a distance can be intimidating to people who feel they cannot or do not wish to act in this way. While safety and respect are essential aspects of welcoming public spaces, silence can be an intimidating feature that limits engagement, learning, and feelings of inclusion and comfortability (Perry & Medina, 2011; Morse, 2021). Safety is described by Morse as not only a physical reality but also an emotional one in which visitors feel “free from judgement”, something that requires relationship building and the development of trust, especially when working with vulnerable groups (p. 137).

Grodach (2010) explores the potential for multipurpose exhibit spaces to be initiators of this change and to counter expectations for museum etiquette. Instead of prioritising solitary reflection, they can also “serve a social function” and be an introductory space for the merging of literature, history, and the arts (p. 486), whether for holding workshops surrounded by an exhibit, opening as a general “gathering space”, or renting it out as a venue for events (p. 475). It creates opportunity for “interaction within and between groups” whether defined by ethnicity, class, age, gender, interest, or other (p. 484). Grodach significantly notes, however, that trying to appeal to everyone can make it difficult to meaningfully engage, which means that each museum needs to identify the “underrepresented groups” that they can best serve (p. 487). Ultimately, creating a space to revisit rather than functioning primarily for tourists can best serve all whether returning or one-time visitors.

#### **4. Education in Literary Museums**

Reading for fun is often considered a solitary pastime described by Ian Jenkins in *Literary Tourism: Theories, Practice and Case Studies* (2019b), as having the ability to stimulate the imagination and “take the reader to another world (a form of vicarious tourism)” (p. 12), and likewise, learning in literary museums has been approached as the

act of traveling in the “author’s footsteps” (Çevik, 2023, para. 3). In the TULE e-dictionary submission, “Educational Function of Literary Tourism”, Samet Çevik (2023) acknowledges an intentional expansion of the literary museum’s goals when engaging with audiences, including that books, storytelling, and varying forms of literacy have a wealth of transformative social potential. Informed by *Transforming Museums in the Twenty-First Century* (Black, 2011), a reflection on Çevik’s contribution, uniquely exemplifies how general literary museums are engaging with lifelong learning practices that prioritise wellbeing and have policies that are representative and participatory which will be explored here further.

#### **4.1. Lifelong Learning**

To begin, the language of literary museums has shifted towards “introducing” and “experimenting” with literary culture and various genres, as well as nurturing literacy, which widens the audience to people possibly unfamiliar with the work or author in question (Çevik, 2023, para. 4). UNESCO’s (2024, July 17) definition of literacy is: “a continuum of learning and proficiency in reading, writing and using numbers throughout life and is part of a larger set of skills, which include digital skills, media literacy, education for sustainable development and global citizenship as well as job-specific skills” (para. 2). The scope of literacy is thus expansive and ever-changing, with close ties to the pedagogy of “lifelong learning” which is the retaining and nurturing of a curious and open mind throughout one’s life, whether participating in formal or informal learning (Hastings & Mikayelyan, 2020, p. 111). Reading specifically has been found to improve self-esteem, reduce risk of depression, improve sleep, “increase creativity”, and generally contribute to good health (du Sautoy, 2021, p. 326). As of 2020, “one in five adults” in Europe and North America “reported low reading skills” (Burns, 2021, p. 6) and a 2013 report conducted by the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) (n.d.) in Ireland, showed correlation between scoring low on the literacy scale and believing they had “little impact on political processes”, being less willing to trust others, and choosing not to participate in volunteer activities (para. 10). UNESCO emphasises the “critical importance of human contact”, especially in learning and for wellbeing and is currently conducting a global survey on the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on literacy worldwide (Sandell, 2007, p. 98). The pandemic’s disruption of education and social

engagement is evident, but the specifics have yet to be uncovered (Burns, 2021; UNESCO, 2024, July 17).

In keeping with Candlin's (2008) exploration of how deep-seated views of class have impacted centuries of museum engagement, John Falk (2009) focuses on how an individual's identity, including motivations, assumptions, emotions, and needs shape their museum visit or determine if they step over the threshold at all. McMillian and Carlse (2020) articulate the same concept in a philosophical turn, as valuing the visitor's lived experience and creating space for not only "knowing" and "doing" but also "being" (McMillian and Carlse, 2020, p. 26). In other words, it is an intersectional approach, interested not only in sharing information and creating a memorable experience but about creating a place where people can gain confidence as critical thinkers, engage with unknowns, and feel safe to try new things (p. 27). Within a literary museum space this involves retaining the imaginative elements, while remaining rooted in the present, guiding visitors to consider "aspects of themselves" as well as their value and potential as "global-local" citizens through the lens of literature and varying forms of communication (p. 27; UNESCO, 2019, November 8).

#### **4.2. Representation**

Another essential aspect of lifelong learning, as described by McMillian and Carlse (2020) is "challenging the status quo" and dominant narrative by highlighting "marginalised voices" (p. 29), or as Prottas (2020) says, "untold stories", in exhibits and relevant workshops and events (p. 222). The UNESCO Strategy for Youth and Adult Literacy (2020-2025) (2019) states that "literacy interventions can contribute to empowering women and other disadvantaged people and groups to participate in social, economic, political and cultural activities" (p. 1). For migrants and refugees, engaging in literacy groups can increase their "sense of belonging, their ability to communicate, secure jobs and improve health, while maintaining as well as improving literacy in their mother tongue" (p. 2). Literature can also be empowering when a person sees their physical features and lived experience reflected in the author or character, and reading and listening to stories that differ from their own can foster empathy (Villalobos et al, 2022, p. 40). Çevik (2023) articulates actions literary museums can take to engage in learning through empathy and dialogue including featuring varying stories and themes, hosting reading groups, online and in person workshops, and storytelling events, almost

all of which are social activities (para. 5; McMillian & Carlse, 2020). Representation also matters in terms of format as well as audience. Eileen Hooper-Greenhill (2007) argues that if curators create an exhibit solely from their own “interpretive framework”, as has traditionally been the case, it will only “feel comfortable” for those who share the same perspective or background (p. 80). For example, oral tradition has historically been considered, from a colonial perspective, less reliable and engaging than written accounts and stories, making it often overlooked or excluded. Including relevant oral storytelling either in digital or in-person form challenges notions of the literary canon and social memory (Green, 2007). Representation and the pedagogy of lifelong learning naturally lend themselves to Feminist Museum Theory, which is the view that museums should value process before order, and participation before their collections (Hooper-Greenhill, 2007, p. 82; Hein, 2007). Many museums that have embraced “feminisation” are described as defying “a single definition” which is true of post-museum spaces and subsequently many literary museums (Schonweger, 2017. p. 159). While a generalisation that women’s museums choose “not to vie for a role in the traditional museum but to create their own spaces” it is certainly true, for example, of the Glasgow Women’s Library (p. 159).

#### **4.3. Participation**

In order to best represent communities around the museum, they require collaboration through consultation and participation rather than functioning as autocratic organisations. It is a shift in power dynamics in keeping with Feminist Museum Theory and lifelong learning which applies to all engaged in the process. Thus, those in the traditional teaching role also approach the interaction, exhibit, or event with curiosity, open to listen and learn from the “student” (McMillian and Carlse, 2020, p. 29, Candlin, 2008). In literary museums this approach can be distinctively applied by engaging audiences in reflexive narrative practices (Lowe, 2015), or as Çevik (2023) describes, facilitating dialogue about historical literary understandings in contrast with those in the present (para. 4). Lopez (2015) suggests that historians and subsequently curators and others engaged in museum interpretation “have often maintained a sense of discomfort with narrative” (p.12). Lowe (2015) is even more specific by arguing that historians have been hesitant to “open up the shop so-to speak” or “to share with visitors precisely those conversations about method and historiography that sustain history’s intellectual vitality” because a close look may

disrupt the “authorised heritage discourse” (Smith, 2006, p. 4) and reveal the uncertain elements of writing and interpreting history (Lowe, 2015, p. 44). Literature is uniquely equipped to introduce and engage with these elements because narrative is the “conscious and unconscious” shaping of the stories or “interpretive tales we craft” (p. 45). It can involve conversations around the creative process, historical or imagined setting and meaning, cultural interpretations, and assessment of rhetoric and etymology (Prottas, 2020; Jennings, et al., 2023).

There is also general agreement that engaging in conversation about the enriching nature of narrative involves “speaking across fields” and building relationships to encourage accountability and the sharing of varied insights (Nightingale and Mahal, 2012, p. 36, Prottas, 2020, McMillian & Carlse, 2020). These partnerships may span not only visitors but also other academics, organisations, community development or social workers, funders, interns, and artists “as a means of communicating collections, developing alternative narratives, promoting inclusivity, and extending reach to new audiences” (Prottas, 2020, p. 350).

## **5. Conclusion**

In conclusion, there is general agreement from Prottas (2020), Watson (2023), Lisa Junkin Lopez (2015), Linda Young (2015; 2018), and Ian Jenkins (2019) that writers’ house museums, as tourist, pilgrimage destinations, are at risk in their traditional state of becoming stagnant, ultimately stifling critical engagement and reinforcing feelings of either disconnect or elitist views of literature. Other forms of literary museums as explored in the collective e-dictionary, demonstrate initiative towards fostering more dynamic, narrative-based, and community-oriented spaces, and is the first source to explore and articulate the subset more thoroughly. The fact that literary museums have layers of language, writing, reading, and oral storytelling by which to explore their collections and spaces should be viewed as an exciting challenge and asset for the sector, in keeping with arguments for post-museum spaces (Watermeyer, 2012) and the reinvention of the museum (Jennings, et al., 2023). Lowe (2015) was the only writer who expressed hope in applying new narrative approaches to historic houses, such as witnessed at the Emily Dickinson Museum. None acknowledged alternative literary museum spaces, however, but their critiques on house museums still provide invaluable context and a mirror by which to consider the

current work of the Glasgow Women's Library and the Museum of Literature Ireland. My intention is to fill the gap with two tangible examples of how general literary museums, in this case a library museum and a national literary museum, differentiate both from traditional museums as well as from writers' house museums and are pursuing lifelong learning, representation, and participation.

## CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

### 1. Topic Development

In 2022, during the first semester of the International Masters in Education in Museums and Heritage, I wrote an essay for Critical Enquiry titled, “The Future of Literary Museums: Sustained Visitor Engagement and the Creative Agency of Narrative”, which served as my first pursuit of the topic and through which I found multiple resources. My case studies were influenced by visits to GWL and MoLI in 2022 which I approached critically as a student but experienced first as a visitor without having intentions to include them in my research. These initial visits served as the basis for my reflections on the emotional impact and value of these spaces, which was important for my research on engagement and Feminist Museum Theory. While gathering sources, I unsuccessfully attempted to contact the International Committee for Literary and Composer’s Museums (ICLCM) (2019, May 2) for the most up to date news on relevant “research, publishing, exhibition and education” (para. 1). Their website still names the ICLCM Board of 2019-2022 which suggests they may no longer be meeting. Despite this unfortunate dead-end, Dr. Sandro Debono kindly put me in touch with Dr. Rita Capurro who in turn guided me to the University for Foreigners of Perugia’s e-dictionary of Literary Tourism (n.d.) organised by Rita Baleiro, Giovanni Capecchi, and Jordi Arcos-Pumarola, and contributed to internationally by academics, journalists, and writers. The e-dictionary served as a significant resource for understanding the most current approaches and conversations.

### 2. Description of Research Sites

#### 2.1. *Glasgow Women’s Library (GWL)*

Glasgow Women’s Library was born from a 1987 temporary arts and activist-based organisation called *Women in Profile* which “aimed to forefront women’s contributions to Glasgow’s history, life and culture” through a series of exhibitions, publications, events and workshops to coincide with Glasgow being the European City of Culture in 1990 (GWL, n.d.c., para. 1; n.d.h.; GWL, 2024b). From the beginning, the founders, a small group of local women including Adele Patrick, an artist and activist, recognised the lack in the city of women’s recorded history, writing, and oral tradition, as well as support of contemporary contributions, and subsequently established a strong vision for social justice with a “key aim” being the empowerment of women (GWL,

n.d.a., para. 4; GWL, 2024). Other values include “addressing inequalities”, “learning and development”, “diversity and inclusivity”, and “openness and respect” (Our Values, n.d.i.; GWL, 2024b). Today, it holds Linked Library status with the Scottish Parliament (GWL, 2024, p. 9), is the “only Accredited Museum dedicated to women’s history in the whole of the UK” and has also been designated as a Recognised Collection of National Significance (GWL, n.d.c., para. 2).

The shift from arts-hub to library and museum happened naturally through the collection of books, magazines, journals, and other items related to women’s history, all of which were and continue to be donated (GWL, 2024, p. 6). First located in Garnethill, then Trongate, they received enough funding in 2015 to renovate and move more permanently into the old Bridgeton Library, in the East End of Glasgow, which they rent from Glasgow City Council for a nominal £750 per year (p. 10). The purpose-built Bridgeton Library is an “early twentieth century Grade B” Listing which carries the legacy of its founder, Andrew Carnegie (p. 9). Carnegie was a Scottish-born industrialist and philanthropist who established twenty-five hundred “open-access libraries” internationally in the early twentieth century, fourteen of which were within Glasgow (Glasgow Life – Carnegie Libraries; Campbell, 2021). All were established with the purpose of bringing literacy and educational opportunities to “the lower classes” (Campbell, 2021). From the Industrial Revolution to the mid-1900s, Bridgeton was a working class community characterised by its textile industry (Currie, 2013, p. 14). Economic decline led to the closure of cotton mills while carpet manufacturing companies were “absorbed by larger firms”, leaving many Bridgeton inhabitants without jobs (p. 14, 30). As of 2011, Bridgeton and neighbouring Calton had a lower life expectancy than the rest of the city as well as higher poverty rates and were the home of many ethnic minorities (Glasgow Indicators Project, 2012). According to the 2020 Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, Bridgeton remains under the most deprived 5% in the country with a population of around 4,200 (Scottish Government, 2020; 2021a). Calton and Gallowgate have a combined population of around 4,800 (Scottish Government, 2021b). GWL is actively immersed in and responds to this context. For example, they seek to remove any financial barriers to accessing and engaging with their resources. There are no fines for late book returns with the hope that it creates a guilt-free space (Kamleitner, 2022), membership is free, and almost all programs and events are free. When charging a fee is necessary, such as for walking tours, the library implements a Pay It Forward

scheme which invites library members of means to contribute to the experiences of others (GWL, 2024b, p. 12). GWL also makes it clear on their website that they will cover transportation costs for volunteers and those who wish to meet one-on-one with someone on the Literacy and Numeracy Team (LN). In their most recent Strategic Plan (2024b), which they review three times a year, GWL articulated their External Environment Analysis including a brief look at the local and long-term political and economic impacts of Brexit, Covid, recent and ongoing wars and genocides, and the cost of living crisis, which impacts everyone but are especially felt by minorities, migrants, and those with less means (pp. 10-11, 19). Their commitment to “Feminist Leadership” and a “Feminist Urban Planning approach” critiques and presents alternative approaches in places historically dictated by “patriarchal values”, as well as nurturing a space for “freedom of expression...allowing for complex discussions away from polarisation, binary thinking and Social Media toxicity” (Strategic Plan, 2024, p. 11). Programmes engage with topics and questions surrounding literacy, working class life, immigration, women’s physical and mental health, sexuality, and violence, among many others (GWL, n.d.a.). While GWL receives funding from Creative Scotland, which supports arts based organisations on behalf of Scotland’s Government and the National Lottery (n.d.a.) and is supported in their programming by the Glasgow City Council Communities Fund, they rely on grants and fundraising to meet daily costs (GWL, n.d.e.).

Their digital footprint is extensive, with a website that provides access to an event calendar, library catalogue, descriptions of their archives, museum, and temporary exhibits, reading lists curated by staff and volunteers, links to their blog and semi-regular podcast, membership, volunteering, and event room rental details, and literacy and numeracy support information. Staff come from ethnically and geographically diverse backgrounds with a variety of educational and working experience including Community Development, Feminist Leadership, Gender Studies, Library Studies, visual arts, curation, English literature, history, architecture, art history, IT, and tutoring, many of whom pursued or are pursuing further education while working at the library (GWL, n.d.g.).

The entrance to the GWL is on the narrow Landressy Street, only a three minute walk from the Bridgeton Train Station. The double doors feature the words “come on in, we’re home” printed on the glass and open automatically, easily accessed via a slight ramp. The lending library, including a reception desk, is the immediate space visitors enter and

features an extensive collection by women writers from over the centuries. While the majority of the books are in English, other languages relevant to the community are also included, and international writers are extensively covered as are “‘hard to find anywhere else’ books” (GWL, n.d.j.). GWL does not have a budget for books making it entirely reliant on donations (GWL, n.d.d.). The extensive collection is a testament to the community’s involvement. There are various places to sit and read, study, or meet amongst the shelves as well as in the adjoining multipurpose room with its high ceilings and bright windows, or upstairs in another multipurpose exhibit space. Various objects from the museum collection and temporary, traveling exhibits are curated and displayed in the library itself, some of which are behind glass, such as delicate objects from the current Militant Suffrage Activism exhibit (1 February - 31 July 2024), visible to the right of the entrance. Whereas others are featured in the exhibit space upstairs or in the corners of the multipurpose room, such as Teenage Kicks (8 March – 18 May 2024). Across the street, the library has a temporary arbour which serves as an interactive art piece; a place to rest and a forum to grieve and “‘imagine peaceful futures” (GWL, 2024a).

The collections, unless on display, are accessible through GWL’s online catalogue and can be seen in person by appointment, whether for personal interest or research. Today, the archives include everything from “‘recipe books and knitting patterns; badges, quilts and protest banners; private journals...newspaper cuttings, oral histories, pictures, and posters” to Women’s Liberation, Lesbian and Queer materials (GWL, n.d.k., para. 3). They are accessed via a balcony overlooking the multipurpose room which retains the original wall features and open concept designed by Carnegie. In the same way, the main offices are visible through glass from the entrance and throughout the main lending library, and many staff work transiently within the library itself.

## **2.2. *Museum of Literature Ireland (MoLI)***

The Museum of Literature Ireland (MoLI) opened in Dublin, a UNESCO City of Literature (2010) in 2019 as a collaborative project between University College Dublin (UCD) and the National Library of Ireland (MoLI, n.d.a.). Located in the Saint Kevin’s neighbourhood overlooking St Stephen’s Green, it is advertised as a “‘new literary hub” where people can participate in “‘creative learning”, “‘explore the story of Ireland’s famous literary culture from past to present” and be inspired to be the Irish writers of the future (Jones, 2021, para. 1; MoLI, n.d.b., para. 1; McManus, 2020). In 2023 MoLI won the

European Heritage Award and was celebrated for being a “value-driven space” aiming to “dismantle elitist perceptions of literature and highlight the unifying power of storytelling and the written (and spoken) word” (European Heritage Award, 2023, June 13, para. 1, 3).

The three Georgian houses that make up the now seamless museum were built as private homes in the 18<sup>th</sup> century and acquired by the Catholic, University College Dublin (UCD), as a campus in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The documentary, *Making a Museum*, which aired on 16 June, 2020 on Raidió Teilifís Éireann (RTÉ), recounts the development of MoLI from its inception in 2010 to its opening in 2019. It highlights how in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, UCD did not have the funds to renovate the Georgian style interiors which is now celebrated because it left many original features intact. The 21<sup>st</sup> century renovations were chosen in such a way as to prioritise accessibility, such as the addition of a central staircase and elevator, while also retaining historic spaces such as the Aula Maxima Victorian lecture hall, and 18<sup>th</sup> century Italian ceiling plaster sculptures. In the words of the documentary, retaining these features creates an opportunity for visitors to “read” the layers of history in the space. Even the renovated rooms retain their association with famous alumni such as James Joyce and Gerard Manley Hopkins who once studied there.

Located in a neighbourhood indicated on the HP Deprivation Indices 2022 as “marginally above average” surrounded by “affluent” neighbourhoods and a few “disadvantaged” ones to the North-West (Pobal), the area has been central to public leisure and wellbeing since the 17<sup>th</sup> century when St Stephen’s Green was established (Office of Public Works, n.d.). The park was briefly privatised but purchased and landscaped by Sir Arthur Guinness before being returned to the people of Dublin. A strategic point in the city, it was used as a base by the rebels during the Easter Rising in 1918 to overthrow British rule (Office of Public Works, n.d.). The area remains a culturally strategic and accessible area.

In an interview with MoLI’s Director, Simon O’Connor, titled “More Than Just a Place to Visit” (2021), O’Connor states that while he is the museum’s first director, the driving forces were staff from the National Museum and UCD who had the vision and archival material on Joyce and other Dublin authors (McManus, 2020). In initial discussions, the project was proposed as the “James Joyce” or “Ulysses” Museum, but it was quickly determined this would limit the project’s audience and potential (Interview with J.). Instead, it was decided that as a new museum they had an opportunity to “[wade]

right in there and [make] bold statements” even if controversial, acknowledging that “Ireland’s history is far richer than five or six writers” (O’Connor & Collins, 2021, p. 192). While James Joyce’s life and work remain central to the permanent exhibits, and to the museum’s name, since the acronym “MoLI” refers to Joyce’s character Molly Bloom from *Ulysses* (Interview with J.), there is also a significant presence of women writers, poetry, folklore, and an emphasis on oral tradition. Simon O’Connor’s interviewer, Lucy Collins (2021), noted that she was impressed with the museum’s attention to the “auditory and visual experience” of language (p. 192). In a country known for its storytellers, O’Connor states that it is an “art form that is continuously absorbing new communities” and thus must represent them (p. 195).

The entrance to MoLI is through Newman House, named by the UCD after their founder, the theologian, philosopher, educator, and writer, John Henry Newman (MoLI, n.d.a.), and it retains its original feeling of grandeur with the staircase visible from the welcome desk. All captions and directions throughout the museum are in English and Irish Gaelic. The exhibit spaces begin with a room dedicated to the building’s history, followed by a short stairwell containing quotes and pictures of significant Irish writers, like a welcoming committee, into the strategically lit temporary exhibit room. In 2022 MoLI curated *Into the Island* here, featuring early 20<sup>th</sup> century recordings from the Folklore Commission with special emphasis on the life and work of Peig Sayers, the “Queen of Irish Storytellers”, which describes written works as only “the tip of the iceberg” of literature. In 2024 the exhibit, *Ink and Imagination: Literary Treasures from UCD Library* (October 2023-October 2024), featured a variety of drafts, volumes, and recordings, which are framed as finding “their meaning when connected with people”. In other words, on their own they may be beautiful, rare objects, but remain lifeless manuscripts and books until connected to their author’s life story or opened, read aloud, and interpreted by people in the present. In the adjoining room, the permanent exhibit *Riverrun of Language* focuses on the sounds of poetry and prose in both English and Irish Gaelic with postcard size excerpts available for people to take. Behind a thin partition resembling paper is another permanent exhibit *A City of Words* which explores the role Dublin has played in literature, especially in James Joyce’s writing. Upstairs on an open-concept mezzanine structure is a chronological exhibit on how Ireland found its independent voice, covering topics such as censorship, freedom of expression, journaling, and publishing as protest. Nearby is a reading area with comfortable chairs and

translations of Irish books in various languages. A bookcase partition hides the performance area on the other side which doubles as an exhibit space and another resting place for visitors. More temporary exhibits are featured further on including *Irish Writing Now* which features recent contributions to young adult literature, complete with copies of the books that can be flipped through, and *Literary Cities* which reflects on the UNESCO award and Dublin's connections and solidarity with them, especially neighbouring Edinburgh, Scotland, the first city to get the title. Upstairs houses the first copy of *Ulysses* with personifying emphasis on stirring people to imagine "all that that artefact has seen" (McManus, 2020). The floor also exhibits an exploration of translations of Joyce's novel, and a room dedicated to Joyce's writing process which includes an invitation to sit down at a table covered in blank sheets of paper and pencils with the prompt: "Everyone has a book in them. What's the first line of yours?" Another floor up is the LitLab (n.d.) which is the "dedicated family-friendly space" with children's exhibitions and a workshop area with comfortable chairs, light, and bright décor (para. 1). Scattered throughout the building is the exhibit *Is This a Poem?: Adventures on the Edge of an Artform* (February-September 2024) framed as an experiment, all curated by poet Christodoulos Makris, in their various forms including languages such as English, Gaelic, and Braille as well as experienced audibly and through touch (GWL, n.d.e.). The exhibit acts as a scavenger hunt and due to their random locations in hallways and stairwells, invites visitors to engage with each poem independent of the others as well as possibly make unexpected bridges between the exhibits. Downstairs is the Commons Café and access to the gardens which is open for free to the public through a gate connected to the Iveagh Gardens<sup>1</sup>. A quote from Maeve Binchy's book *Circle of Friends*, which is partly set in Newman House, is inscribed on the gate: "It was peaceful there and unfamiliar. Not like almost every other square inch of Dublin". It was intentionally chosen as women have historically been excluded from literary circles and places of education, including UCD (McManus, 2020).

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<sup>1</sup> Iveagh Gardens is known as Dublin's "Secret Garden". A public park which is more secluded and quieter than St Stephen's Green but just as accessible. Like St Stephens, the Iveagh Gardens have a long history as a private and public green space, but its current features were designed by Glaswegian-born gardener and landscaper, Ninian Niven in 1865 in preparation for the Dublin Exhibition (Office of Public Works, n.d.).

MoLI received significant one-time grants from the Naughton Foundation and Fáilte Ireland to establish themselves, but as a community museum, MoLI is dependent on tickets, donations, sponsors, grants, shop purchases, and venue hire to meet operational costs, which is a challenge being in one of the most expensive European cities (O'Connor and Collins, 2021, p. 198; MoLI, n.d.d.). Admission is free every first Friday of the month, teachers and secondary school groups can book free visits along with self-guided resources, and regular family and student discounts are advertised, especially on holidays (MoLI Visit; Learning Resources). Annual memberships (€50 for an individual, €30 for under 30, and €60 for a family of up to 2 adults and 4 children) are worth the investment if visitors plan to visit more than twice a year since a ticket for a family of four is regularly €32 and €12 for children over 3 (Buy MoLI Membership; MoLI Visit). Membership provides a free plus one, allows access to the library, provides shop discounts, and invitations to exclusive events. While consistently reevaluating their ticket pricing, MoLI's target audience is children and youth, and most of their in-house programming, is intended to empower the next generation of readers, writers, and story keepers (O'Connor and Collins, p. 194; Interview with J.). They also offer free family workshops, such as Shut Your Eyes and See, lectures, RadioMoLI, and a Ukrainian Creative Hub, led by a local poet along with an interpreter in the LitLab, the latter to be a space for the influx of refugees in the city due to the war, to connect with others, introduce them to Irish poetry, and provide space for them to express themselves both in Ukrainian and English through writing and art (MoLI Ukrainian Creative Hub). MoLI collaborates with local schools, the YMCA, Solas, UCD Access and Lifelong Learning, Refugee Council, and many other organisations, providing onsite activities and offsite visits and material which can be borrowed for educational purposes (O'Connor and Collins, 2021).

### **3. Methodology**

My research is grounded in qualitative methodology, described in simple terms by Fraenkel, Wallen, and Hyun (2012) as being “interested in *how* things occur” such as the ways people interact, answer questions, use certain words, or translate their “attitudes” into actions and in the “perspective of the subjects of the study” (p. 427). More specifically, I adopted a reflexive thematic approach as presented by Braun and Clarke (2021). They define reflexivity as “a disciplined practice of critically interrogating what we do, how and why we do it, and the impacts and influences of this on our research”

(Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 5). Like lifelong learning, reflexivity is an ongoing practice based on the assumption that themes in data “do not passively ‘emerge’” but are an active creation of the researcher (p. 8). I chose case studies as the means of my ethnographic research in order to gain extensive insight into the workings of a couple examples rather than a general perspective (Fraenkel, Walken, & Hyun, 2012, p. 13). Also, rather than compare the case studies with the intention of finding the best museum model, my research looks closely at the innovations made by two well respected museums within different contexts, with the intention of finding patterns of approaches to literature and literacy, and subsequently insight into visitor engagement. As representatives of different types of literary museums, they act as insight into the larger “tapestry” of the sector (Braun and Clarke, 2021, p. 6).

“Thematic analysis” is the means by which interpretation of the collected data takes place, and involves multiple steps, including coding the data using both semantic (explicit meaning) and latent (implicit meaning) labels, followed by generating initial themes, then refining, and finally weaving those extracts into a compelling narrative or “coherent and persuasive story” for the reader (Braun & Clarke, 2021, pp. 35-36; Fraenkel, Walken, & Hyun, 2012, p. 426). This paradigm aligns with the ethos of literary museums, and more specifically, my case studies, which both value the individual’s perspective as presented creatively through writing and other forms of storytelling, and also present literature as a tool for understanding and shaping society. Braun and Clarke’s framework also outlines the variations within or spectrum of thematic analysis which was instrumental in defining the orientation of my research. First, it is a “relativist” study aiming to reveal varying realities found in the dataset, second, it is more “experiential” and “inductive” due to emphasis being on the collection of data rather than the hypothesis (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 10). As described by Fraenkel, Walken, and Hyun (2012), it is about “constructing a picture that takes shape as they collect and examine the parts” (p. 427). However, as already noted, I experienced both museums as a visitor before beginning my research, I did hypothesise that their policies and practices were people centred and would thus be rich resources for my prospective research. Conducting semi-structured interviews with staff allowed for more of a conversational approach and ultimately created room for participants to articulate themselves and guide the interview, mirroring the narrative approach (p. 427).

#### 4. Methods

Due to my close proximity to GWL in Glasgow, Scotland, and the distance to MoLI in Dublin, Ireland, I naturally collected more data from the former than the latter. GWL consequently carries the weight of my research, but even so, the information collected in a one-day visit to MoLI was extensive. After contacting the museums in early March 2024 to inform them of my research and desire to include them as case studies, I waited to begin onsite work until after receiving their approval (Appendix A & B).

My official observations began at the Glasgow Women's Library on 28 March 2024 when I attended a Story Café event and ended on 19 June 2024 following an afternoon of working in the library space and interviewing a member of the National Lifelong Learning Team. My onsite observations at the Museum of Literature Ireland were conducted during a full day visit on 3 May 2024 and my last email correspondence with the Head of Learning and Culture regarding visitor statistics was also on 19 June 2024. Over the approximately two and a half months of onsite research, I spent twenty-five hours at GWL, fourteen of those being for events and workshops, and the other eleven being for interviews and working in the space while taking general observational notes. During my one day at MoLI which consisted of interviews, exploring the exhibits, and engaging in their First Friday events, I spent nine hours in their space. During four months of communication with the museums and two and a half months of active data collection, including reviewing their online and printed resources, organising semi-formal interviews in person and by email with learning and operations staff, and conversing with interns and volunteers.

Observational data was collected by field notes and pictures for reference (taken of exhibit and workshop features, not people). Field notes and reflections were written immediately after the event, either in the museum space itself, or upon my return home, as this ensured I could be fully engaged during the event and that my actions would not be a distraction to other participants. I recorded the number of participants, volunteers, and staff, the general ages represented, where people were from (when this came up in conversation), the structure of the event, my emotional responses to the atmosphere and material shared, and responses to the exhibit or programme as vocalised by other participants. My observational approach was influenced by Margaret Lindauer guide in "The Critical Museum Visitor" featured in *New Museum Theory and Practice* (2006), taking into consideration the museum's architecture and internal design choices, followed

by display styles, the curatorial tone or “writing style” of captions, and consideration of “unspoken messages” (p. 213). As an observer I also paid attention to the “spatial structure” of the rooms in terms of visitor movement, accessibility, and social experience (whether people interacted with the exhibits quietly by themselves or with others, ignored exhibit elements, or engaged with staff or volunteers. All of these aspects were based on Sophia Psarra’s article “Spacial culture, wayfinding and the educational message” which appears in *Reshaping Museum Space* (2005). I was especially attentive to noise levels and whether exhibit spaces were used for alternative purposes either intentional or unintentional, as guided by the academic literature I reviewed. Observations of each museum’s digital landscape were just as important and involved reading their monthly e-newsletters, listening to their respective podcast appearances as well as RadioMoLI, and regularly checking the GWL website for new blog posts.

Interviews were strategically conducted with various educational staff as well as those coordinating volunteers and generally engaging with the public, based on their availability. I conducted three interviews with GWL staff, with one being via email with three staff on the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Team (Appendix C). Meanwhile at MoLI, I conducted one planned interview with the Learning and Culture Director, and then was kindly invited by the Office Manager to have a conversation. Due to the informal nature of the in-person interviews, including tours around the buildings, I chose not to record but rather to take brief notes which I later filled out in more detail. When needed, I asked the interviewee via email for clarification. I then copied all field and interview notes into documents on MAXQDA24 research software which provided me with the tools to consolidate, review, and code.

## **5. Role of Researcher**

My goal as the researcher was to be a “subjective storyteller” or interpreter as defined by Braun and Clarke (2021, p. 6). There is a triple layer of interpretation being presented in my research. First, the evaluations made by museum staff, second, participant responses, and thirdly, my own observations while immersed in the same experiences as the participants. Engaging in events or workshops with museum participants, however, can pose ethical concerns. At both GWL and MoLI there is consistent engagement with more vulnerable and often intersectional populations including refugees, low income, women at risk, LGBTQ+, and youth (the latter at MoLI)

(Interview with R.; Interview with J.). Regularly observing these spaces created the high probability of engaging with individuals from these communities. With this in mind, no onsite observations were started until I received consent from the relevant staff and clarified my intentions to observe as a participant and respect the anonymity of participants. At GWL's request I then provided them with a list of the events I hoped to join based on a number of variables including, firstly if there was room in the workshop (the events filled up quickly, sometimes a month or two in advance), and most importantly, if I fit the audience profile, as encouraged by my main GWL contact. For example, I did not participate in their Muslim Women Reading group because my presence as a non-Muslim woman would have compromised the experience of others. For the events I was unable to attend, I referenced the library's blog which featured reflections from staff and participants. The staff at MoLI coordinated my visit after I had suggested a few dates. I attended all events on the day in question, firstly as a participant and secondly as a researcher as I did not want people to feel self-conscious as if they were under scrutiny. It allowed me to immerse myself and consider my own experiences and emotional responses in relation to those of other participants and was in keeping with a lifelong learning and co-creative approach (Hastings & Mikayelyan, 2020). At both locations, if my studies and subsequently my research topic came up in conversation, I willingly shared and answered questions, including what role GWL or MoLI played in my work. I did not record any direct comments made by participants at events unless published by the museums themselves. Instead, I focused on general emotions and noted similarities or differences between stories shared.

## **6. Assumptions and Limitations**

While the advantage of such data collection is that it is non-invasive, a disadvantage may be that visitors' perspectives are not thoroughly represented. Given the ethical parameters and limited time for my research, however, engaging alongside others was the most meaningful and productive way to gain understanding of the museum's educational work. Limited time and finances also led me, at the encouragement of my supervisors, to narrow my focus from multiple European literary museum case studies to two within a more localised area. While including both the UK and Republic of Ireland is still culturally and politically broad, they have literary ties and are close geographically, with the first being my place of residence and the second a short flight away. I dedicated

as much time as possible to data collection, while remaining attentive to academic conversations around literary museums as evident in the literature review.

Throughout my research I also kept in mind my bias as a native English speaker and reader with a minor in English literature, currently a postgraduate student, which puts me in the privileged position I critiqued literary museums of catering towards. At the same time, however, my research is motivated by my belief in the empowerment that comes with literacy, critical thinking, the development of empathy through listening to stories, and creative writing which was what drew me to engage with both museum in the first place. I chose two museums that I found engaging upon visits prior to my research which while making me biased in their favour and arguably less willing to see negative patterns, ensures that my desire to research is drawn from an emotional experience and subsequent curiosity to understand what is unique about these spaces. It reflects the potential for museum education to be meaningful, long-term engagement, comfortable with uncertainty, and fostering curiosity (Braun and Clarke, 2021, p. 12). Subjectivity in this case is a strength, reflecting the stance that literary museums can provide space for people to tell their own stories.

Finally, in conducting qualitative, and more specifically, thematic analysis there is risk of confirmation bias or the “tendency to process information by looking for, or interpreting, information that is consistent with one’s existing beliefs” (Casad & Luebering, 2024). Again, this requires reflexivity, or the acknowledgement and constant evaluation of my assumptions and predispositions, especially in the coding and interpretation process (Braun & Clarke, 2021). Practically, I approached my onsite observations with an open mind. For example, while expecting their work to highlight marginalised voices, I anticipated that this equated to primarily migrants or minorities, and while this was certainly a factor, both museums showed great attention through their programming and exhibits to working class narratives, and it was evident that it was well received and reflective of their participant’s identities. I adjusted my research accordingly.

## CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

### 1. GWL Programmes and Events

The following are brief descriptions of the programmes and events at GWL in which I was able to interview staff or participate alongside others.

#### *1.1. Volunteer Programme*

On 8 May 2024 I met with GWL's Volunteering Programme Assistant to discuss their role of "recruiting, training and supporting volunteers" (GWL, n.d.g. sec. 16). It also served as my first opportunity to meet in person with a member of staff to discuss my research. They shared that they approach volunteering as an "activist endeavour" and referred to the library as a "collective" which encapsulates the vision of the Volunteer Development Programme (n.d.g. sec. 16; interview with R.). As of 2024, there are approximately eighty volunteers and their wellbeing is described as "intrinsic" to GWL (Interview with R.; GWL, 2024, March, p. 1). The goal is for volunteers to eventually work in their chosen role or tasks autonomously, enabling women "with varying...formal education, work experience and skills" to gain confidence and make connections (interview with R.; GWL, 2024, p. 7). Volunteering is open to women or "people who are comfortable in a space that centres the experiences of women" (n.d.l. para. 14). Priority is given to those who live locally in the Bridgeton and surrounding areas, have been referred by a local support service or organisation which recognises and collaborates with their work, have a visible or invisible disability or condition, and, or are of an ethnic minority (GWL, n.d.g.; Interview with R.). The Volunteering Programme Assistant suggested that having an intersectional and socially active approach to volunteering places it in stark contrast to those engaged by other museums, libraries, and archives. Indeed, in 2011, the Heritage Lottery Fund commissioned a report on volunteer statistics in the UK cultural sector and the findings were that volunteers are "predominantly older (though slightly younger than in previous years), white, exceptionally well educated, live in affluent areas and work/used to work in highly skilled occupations" (BOP, 2011, September, pp. 1, 30). In fact, volunteers in "Museums, Libraries, and Archives projects are on average older than volunteers from other heritage sites" (BOP, 2011, p. 3). There has yet to be a study for the last decade, and the delay may be attributed to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and possible shifting or lack of resources.

GWL is one of over a hundred volunteer-focused heritage organisations who have ratified an Expression of Commitment to Make Your Mark (n.d.) which provides resources, visibility, and also accountability for inclusive volunteering practices across socioeconomic and ethnic barriers. Their first priority is to work with the availability and interests of volunteers by asking questions such as: Where will they thrive? What are their interests? What skills do they have to share? (GWL, n.d.l). If transportation is a limitation for potential volunteers, travel costs are covered (n.d.l). According to a NCVO study pre-Covid, women are more likely to appreciate flexibility in how they can give their time (McGarvey. 2019). In keeping with this, GWL has made it clear that “there is no set requirements” for “time commitment” (GWL, n.d.l).

### ***1.2. Adult Literacy and Numeracy Programme (ALN)***

The three staff who make up the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Team (ALN) answered my questions via email rather than in person due to their busy schedules, but they provided thorough answers (Appendix C). Their backgrounds include tutoring and Community Learning and Development (two are currently studying). Sessions are always held one on one in the library, event, or exhibit space as there are many tables and chairs to choose from. Literacy support can look like anything from assisting parents who are struggling to help their children with homework, poetry or memoir writing, college papers, job applications, immigration forms, writing a cookbook “with recipes from her own culture”, to learning English. The team is “constantly adapting” their services to the individual needs and requests of visitors and to larger cultural shifts such as the influx of technology and social media which has led them to offer more digital literacy support. The role of technology in their services especially increased during the COVID-19 pandemic, many of which have continued. For example, since 2020, women who are unable to visit the physical library due to their schedule or mobility can now engage with ALN staff and volunteers online. One staff noted how they are currently working to fill a gap for ESOL (English as a Second or Other Language) since “there isn’t enough provision for that in Glasgow”.

### ***1.3. National Lifelong Learning Programme***

On 19 June 2024, I met with the Development Worker who has been in the position for fifteen years and generously made time to meet with me at the GWL to discuss her work. Known for her “breathtaking knowledge of Scotland’s minor road and

rail networks through taking the library's learning programme to many places" (GWL, n.d.g., sec. 6), she has travelled to the isles, far north, and along the border to the south to work with small groups of women, many of whom are working class, lead workshops in women's prisons, take exhibitions on the road, and offer tour guide training and heritage project consultations, among many other things. The goal in some cases, as with a small group of working class women in Clydebank, is for GWL staff to equip and empower the women to eventually run their own program. When she began the role in 2009, it was comprised mainly of networking with organisations to form partnerships, but it is now more likely that her team will be approached by organisations and small groups and that they will not have the capacity to engage (interview with M.). The team is comprised of two staff and multiple volunteers, with the other Development Worker focused on coordinating events for women and non-binary people of colour both within and outside the library, such as Readers of Colour and Reading the Stirling Castle (as discussed under "Other") (GWL, n.d.g.). In both cases their work reaches women who may not yet know that the library exists, those who struggle with threshold fear and find the GWL intimidating to enter, or in the case of those in cities or smaller communities further away, simply unable to visit in person. Objects and collections from the archives are regularly taken on the road, and groups often take the opportunity to contribute their finished projects to the GWL archives. Connections have also been made with other women's museums in Europe, and even further afield with a library in Nigeria (Interview with M.).

#### **1.4. Story Café**

A casual but intimate group of women that gather in the multipurpose room twice a month to "dip into stories and poems by some of the best women writers around" and "spark...curiosity" over lunch and a cup of coffee or tea (GWL, 2023, April 25). During my research period, these events were less regular due to staff being away, and regular attendees were vocal about their anticipation for it to be more consistent again. Both times I participated there were new visitors, some of whom had travelled from further West and South of Scotland and even Northern England (for example, someone on their way North stopped in Glasgow specifically to visit GWL). It is facilitated by GWL's Librarian and a few volunteers, and often features special guests. On the 28 March, Margaret McQuade McAuslan visited to read excerpts from her *Memoirs of a Gallus Weegie* ("Gallus" being the Scots word for "cheeky, mischievous or bold", while "Weegie" is slang for

Glaswegian [Visit Scotland]), including growing up in a working class family in nearby Calton in the 1950s-60s. The second Story Café theme was working class women's contributions to literature in which an intern from Exeter doing her PhD on the topic read excerpts from various women writers and facilitated conversation around them.

On the 25 July, the current Makar of Scotland, Kathleen Jamie, read her poems and nonfiction at a Story Café, and the former Makar of Scotland, Jackie Kay has also been hosted by the GWL, including for the launch of her new book of poetry, *May Day* (GWL, 2024, April 23). "Makar" is the Scots word for an author, poet, or bard and since 2004 has been used to name the National Poet of Scotland which is now a five-year tenure (Scottish Poetry Library, n.d.). Such events fill their capacity quickly, which meant I was unable to attend Jackie Kay's book launch. Registration can be done in person at the library, over the phone, and online through the Calendar of Events on the GWL website. Spots for events vary depending on room capacity and type of event. For example, creative writing groups such as Open Book have a limit of one table of participants which is most likely intended to create an intimate and less intimidating atmosphere, whereas Story Café, which is held in the event space can have 20 plus participants, especially when hosting special guests.

### **1.5. *Women Making It***

A monthly event run by two staff who take turns teaching an art form, or assisting participants who want to teach their own creative skill. In the past they have done candle making, collaging, block printing, and Mandela stone dotting (GWL, 2023, April 25b). When I participated on the 12 April 2024, they were teaching raffia basket weaving. The two hour session created a relaxing environment to socialise while vocalising our surprise over the difficulties, techniques, and satisfying aspects of the practice. It also created space to discuss the history of weaving and how it has been a part of women's lives across many cultures for centuries.

### **1.6. *Teenage Kicks: Girls Growing up in Britain 1956-1974***

A one-time workshop held in connection with the temporary exhibit by the same name. The exhibit was designed as a living room or parlour complete with comfortable chairs, books on a side table, and a TV screen with subtitles which played quietly and could be watched while sipping a cup of tea. After introductions from the main researcher and artist, both from the University of Manchester (n.d.), including the project's multi-

year journey from interviews with women born between 1939-1952, to anonymised story-form, to a beautifully illustrated Zine, to an exhibit available online (p. 3). In response, participants were encouraged to create a collage or Zine epitomising their own teenage years, as well as to contribute to a collective collage. The ten participants represented multiple generations and as women mingled and reminisced about their youth, they naturally shared and compared their experiences and emotions. The workshop was initially for the generation who was the focus of the exhibit, but was opened up to others, including myself in order to increase and broaden engagement. The creators shared with me how the GWL was the first museum to display their exhibit which had given it traction with other museums that had ignored or dismissed it prior, which emphasised how respected GWL is within the UK museum context.

### **1.7. *World Book Night Giveaway***

An event held in association with The Reading Agency on the UNESCO International Day of the Book (23 April), it often involves gifting books with the intention of inspiring people to read for fun (World Book Night, n.d.). The Ready Agency's website states that "reading for pleasure is a globally recognised indicator in a huge range of social issues from poverty to mental health" (World Book Night, n. d.). While the event was cancelled due to the staff hosting the event being unable to make it, the library still had a collection of books wrapped by staff and volunteers and the invitation to take one for free. On the wrapping were key words and the genre (e.g. "darkly humorous, Scottish memoir") to peak visitor's interests while retaining an element of surprise.

### **1.8. *Garnethill Women's Heritage Walk***

On 27 April 2024 I joined a group of seventeen women on a women's heritage tour of Garnethill. All but four of the women were from Glasgow, revealing its local rather than tourist draw. Four volunteer guides of various ages and backgrounds (one was retired, another was a recent PhD graduate) took turns presenting the stops. Sites covered included the first location of the GWL when it was still Women in Profile, a school, an infirmary, and topics such as women's contributions to art, education, medical care, family life, and careers. One of the older guides prompted at various sites with "does anyone remember when...?" which made for reminiscing and storytelling amongst the participants.

### **1.9. *Open Book***

A monthly small group writing session facilitated by local author, Kathrine Sowerby, and described as a “warm and supportive” space with low stakes to “get your creative juices flowing” (GWL, 2024, June 4). Participants were of various ages, and included people who wrote regularly, those who had never written, or had not written for a long time. When I joined on 4 June 2024, there were six other participants and we began with a word association prompt followed by poetry and short story readings, discussions, and further writing prompts inspired by the readings. If participants felt comfortable, they could share their writing with the group. This is another event that fills quickly so I was only able to participate in one during the months I conducted research.

### **1.10. *Other GWL Programmes and Events***

As explained under Role of Researcher, the following are events I was unable to participate in due to ethical considerations, because they were already fully booked, or I could not make them due to work, but which are integral to understanding GWL’s scope and audience. Conversation Café is a bi-monthly gathering hosted by the Adult Literacy and Numeracy Team where women can “practise English and Scottish words and phrases and learn about each other’s lives and cultures” (GWL, 2023, September 25, para. 1). The monthly Reading Group for Muslim Women creates space to read and discuss books written by Muslim Women (GWL, 2023, April 25a) and Readers of Colour is a monthly event organised by the National Lifelong Learning Team that offers in person gatherings in Glasgow and Edinburgh, as well as an online option, to “read writing by Women and Non-binary Writers of Colour” (GWL, 2020, July 13, para. 1). Reading the Stirling Castle was a one-time event following an invitation from Historic Environment Scotland, at which women and non-binary people of colour “set out to discover what might happen when we gather to read aloud in a location that is framed or perceived as far far away from our own lives and histories” (Brown, 2024, para. 3).

In the library itself, Ukrainian author Anna Molman hosted “Writing fiction is a way of programming the future”, a creative writing workshop delivered once in English and once in Ukrainian (GWL, 2024, July 18), while Tell Her Story: Remembering the Hidden Victims of Honour-Based Abuse was held in tandem with the opening of a GWL exhibition and in partnership with AMINA Muslim Women’s Resource Centre, including

monologues, spoken word, and a conversation with author Soma Davi (GWL, 2024, July 12).

## **2. MoLI Programmes and Events**

The following are brief descriptions of the programmes and events at MoLI in which I was able to interview staff or participate alongside others.

### **2.1. *Head of Learning and Culture***

I was welcomed by the Head of Learning and Culture upon my arrival at the Museum of Literature Ireland on 3 May 2024 and spent approximately an hour with her, learning about the role and receiving a tour of the historic house and office spaces. Even before the museum opened, she encouraged “people-centred practices”, conducting workshops with groups of kids, asking them to imagine the space. Their suggestions were taken into consideration when designing the LitLab specifically, including the use of “bright, calm and welcoming” colours (MoLI, n.d.i.), lots of tables and chairs, and details such as a window seat, and a water fountain. The LitLab is a laboratory and as she described, a “rec centre in a museum” suggesting action, and acting as a place to explore writers in the past but also move in the present and towards the future. Six months into the workshop stage of designing the museum learning programmes, and less than a year after the museum opened, COVID-19 halted in-person brainstorming and the initial momentum while forcing them to deeply consider the museum’s identity and how it would engage with and remain vital to the public. MoLI staff have developed relationships with community partners to conduct for example, workshops for Ukrainian refugees and literacy training, with seventy-two being the average age of participants for the latter (Interview with J.). MoLI also hosts storytelling sessions for families with young children, as well as peer led creative writing groups, and virtual workshops for youth. One such workshop, in 2021, introduced students to astrophysicists and culminated in them writing a collaborative poem which was then engraved on the EIRSAT-1 satellite for “Ireland’s first venture into space” (RTÉ, 2023, December 2). Such workshops create an opportunity for kids to become familiar with a variety of professions as well as contribute on a meaningful and lasting scale. MoLI has recently initiated a “restructuring” which will continue the practice in its young life of evaluating their vision, impact, and budget.

## **2.2. First Fridays**

A monthly, free admission event including visits from various artists. On 3 May 2024, there was a turnout of about thirty individuals, and MoLI staff began the evening by introducing and then showing a film in the Old Physics Theatre titled *Údar agus Agallamh: Ailbhe Ní Ghearbhuigh*. It was an uncut interview with Kerry-born poet Ailbhe Ní Ghearbhuigh which was held entirely in Gaelic with English subtitles. In it, she shared about her life as a Gaelic speaker and her contributions to keeping the language alive through her writing. After a brief intermission in which participants visited the café, wandered the exhibits, or sat reading, we gathered in the Aula Maxima Victorian lecture hall, turned exhibit space, for a violin concert by musician Larissa O’Grady. She wove in spoken word to her performance of modern compositions and the acoustics of the old hall were exceptional. O’Grady herself noted the honour of playing in such a space surrounded by literary heritage and specifically a poem from the “Is this a Poem?” Exhibit.

## **2.3. Other MoLI Programmes and Events**

The Edna O’Brien Young Writers Bursary is a yearly, one week creative writing retreat hosted by MoLI for youth ages 15-17. Named in honour of an acclaimed novelist and screenwriter known for her candid depictions of women, it is generously funded by arts philanthropist, Suzanne Lopez (MoLI, n.d.; Edna O’Brien Bursary, 2023). It is “a rare and deep focus on immersing these amazing students in the possibilities of writing” and an opportunity to learn from a new mentor and special guests every year (2023, p. vi). At the end of the week, the student’s work is published and becomes available for purchase in the museum shop. Their contributions are described as poems and short stories “that infuse the English language with subversive bursts of Irish”, “darkly comic visions” of the future, breakup, robots, grief, friendship, etc. (p. viii). Each participant’s work has a brief, and in some cases, cheeky bio which highlights their roots, interests and personality. The majority are from areas outside of Dublin and so the bursary is also framed as an opportunity to visit and be immersed in the capital.

Another reoccurring event at MoLI is the Bloomsday Party held on 16 June, which in 2024 was the celebration of “102 years of Joyce’s *Ulysses*” (MoLI, 2024, June 16). Festivities included listening to “live music from Ireland’s most exciting musicians and rappers” in the *Riverrun of Language* exhibit space (2024, June 16, para. 1). The party

extended throughout the exhibits and into the garden and is a highly anticipated by locals and those connected to UCD (Interview with J.).

HOMESWEETHOME was a “multidisciplinary festival” and “epic project” held at MoLI from 7-9 June 2024 as part of the ULYSSES European Odyssey Project (ULYSSES European Odyssey, n.d.a., para. 2). It is an international consortium which met in a total of eighteen cities, each taking a turn to host an event with a designated theme inspired by *Ulysses*, an honour which came with the task of supporting art residencies and writing commissions. The consortium’s goal is to create “a new arts and society charter for Europe” (ULYSSES European Odyssey, n.d.b., para. 2) by using literary themes spanning the Greek *Odyssey* and Joyce’s roughly parallel novel to spark conversation, hope, and action regarding our shared futures. Themes discussed at the events and conferences included, family, migration, well-being, “torn dreams of the 21<sup>st</sup> century”, the “role of neighbourhood communities in post-Covid Europe”, “Urban renewal”, and “creative dialogue with the dead” (ULYSSES European Odyssey, n.d.c.). MoLI’s theme as the host for the Dublin event was “What is home?” which was explored “through talks, discussions, performances, music, workshops, food, and more” and was open to the public (MoLI, n.d.a, para. 1).

## CHAPTER 5: INTERPRETATIONS

### 1. Emergence of Themes

I developed codes from the data by colour coding my observations, quotes and notes from interviews that fell under repetitive themes including, safety, transparency regarding policy, transparency regarding narrative, physical and emotional accessibility, relationship and trust, wellbeing, and learning together (humility, listening, ongoing). I then considered the interconnection of the codes and ultimately their relationship to my research questions and consolidated them accordingly.

### 2. How do general literary museums utilise space and narrative to engage visitors in participatory storytelling?

#### 2.1. *Designing Multipurpose Spaces*

Both GWL and MoLI recognise and address the fact that cultural spaces can feel elitist, so they seek to shift perceptions and expand their audiences through their online and in person presentation and use of space (Candlin, 2008; Interview with M.; Interview with J.). While writers' house museums are more limited because of preservation efforts, both GWL and MoLI, although general literary museums, are still working with heritage listed buildings and must overcome the threshold fear that may result from their architecture, one being a Carnegie library and the other Georgian houses. Both museums seek to combat this with an active social media presence and by promoting their "essential" services which Gurian (2005) argues is the best way to overcome people's hesitancy or indifference (p. 205). In the case of GWL, helping people with forms of literacy is a great means of first contact because once connected one-on-one, individuals become aware of the varying events and resources available to them and are more likely to return. MoLI similarly provides literacy resources and opportunities for teachers and students to engage in their space.

A major indicator of the difference between GWL and traditional libraries is that it is not a space dictated by a spoken or unspoken rule to be quiet such as explored by Lainsbury (2019) and Jenkins (2019a). I experienced this firsthand, for while participating in the writing workshop, Open Book, the facilitator noted how unusually quiet the main room was that morning. Upon other visits, the library was certainly a hub of activity, but always respectful, and there was a sign noting the designated quiet space for the day which changes on a daily basis depending on the rooms needed for events.

MoLI also indicated that they wish to remove the perception that museums are austere, academic places where behaviour may become performative or be uncomfortable (interview with J.). One of the ways MoLI does this is by holding events in the museum space itself. During the annual Bloomsday Party held on 16 June (the day Joyce's *Ulysses* takes place), MoLI hosts rappers and DJs whose contributions to the museum event are meaningfully framed as "their adventures with language echo Joyce's own fearlessness with words" (MoLI, 2024, June 16). It is an opportunity to interact with people who push the boundaries of creativity in the present, just as Joyce did in the past.

Upon almost immediate entry at GWL, the visible presentation of their space as multipurpose is evident through the placement of chairs and tables, as well as by being in consistently diverse use as opposed to being dichotomised as exhibit, learning, or meeting rooms. It shifts expectations of who is welcome and the behaviour they may be expected to adopt. On GWL's website an up-to-date Policies and Reports page and biographies of the current twenty-four staff, including descriptions of their roles, creates a sense of transparency and engagement even before entering the physical museum space. To possibly counter the imposing nature of their Carnegie building, and certainly as a way to present their vision as a place for women of the present to feel comfortable and realise their potential, their front doors use welcoming language: "come on in, we're home" (GWL, n.d.i.). "Home" ideally denotes a place where a person can relax and be themselves, and GWL staff continue to create this atmosphere inside by welcoming visitors from the front desk and offering tea and coffee to visitors sitting down or joining an event, which they can enjoy throughout the building. Staff and volunteers are easily recognisable by their pins which also include their pronouns, and there is immediate evidence of a diverse group of people working in terms of age, ability, and ethnicity. In response, participants in the events and workshops I joined consistently vocalised how they feel at home which is evident through their willingness and even eagerness to share life stories, both about the past and present, read aloud their writing to groups, and generally initiate conversation with those around them. At GWL a homelike, accessible environment is also created through a lived-in feel with tables, chairs, and cushions scattered throughout the bookshelves and adjoining rooms, a visible kitchen, and an iconic, specially designed carpet with the pattern of the Bridgeton Cross, a local fixture, and a testament to the area's carpet industry heritage. It contrasts arts centres or museums which prioritise pristine and minimal aesthetics and display objects as the focal point.

Their outreach programs and partnerships further extend the concept of the museum space and community beyond the walls of the library (Interview with M.).

MoLI is more of a traditional museum design with multiple rooms dedicated to exhibits, a designated learning and workshop room (LitLab), and suggested routes for navigating the various rooms and floors created by caption placement and partitions, but the staff and volunteers have also created homey touches to the building and exhibits with fresh flowers on windowsills, and copies of books, sometimes in multiple languages, placed throughout relevant exhibits which visitors are invited to pick up, flip through, and sit down and read. Various comfortable resting places are scattered throughout the rooms, volunteers wander and are available to answer questions or give short tours, and literature and language is celebrated in a light-hearted manner by integrating quotes from Irish authors into directions around the building. For example, a quote from Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake*, "the meeting of the waters" is used on the stairwell to direct people to the toilets. Everything, including directional signs and exhibit captions are presented in both English and Irish Gaelic which is a statement of Irish identity and an invitation for locals and foreigners alike to engage with a historically oppressed language. Finally, despite needing to limit the amount of light reaching the exhibit areas due to the sensitive nature of paper artefacts, including books, manuscripts, letters, and drawings, MoLI balances this with a brightly lit central staircase and elevator looking out over the garden, which was an important addition for accessibility during the renovation (McManus, 2020).

MoLI's First Friday event on 3 May 2024 exemplified that many participants felt comfortable to make the exhibit space their own. During the intermission, approximately five individuals of ages varying from university students to seniors pulled out books of their own or from the exhibits and sat down to read. Such behaviour is made possible not only by the placement of chairs and cushions, but also by the language of the exhibits which is consistently invitational and acknowledges the presence and importance of the visitor. For example, in the final exhibit room which includes a display of Joyce's drafts, the main feature is a large table. Here, before the visitor finishes their exploration, they are encouraged to ask themselves "what do you see and hear? What do you feel? What can you create? Imagine: one day, we might have a museum about you!" Paper and pencils are available as are printed and recorded prompts from various authors which can be listened to through speakers uniquely hanging from the ceiling. In an exhibit featuring

messy manuscripts, there is a possibility for people to pause and reflect on the creative process rather than only finished products. Before they leave, they are invited to pin their own scribbles on the wall above the fireplace, opposite of Joyce's. It encourages people to sit for as long as they wish, formulate and share their thoughts, contributing a piece of themselves to the museum, and making the exhibit a growing collection, anticipating future creatives. The idea of an ongoing narrative extends in the way MoLI speaks of the city of Dublin as a continuation of the literature represented. As Dr. Sandra Collins, Director of the National Library of Ireland states, writing "animates" the city and vis versa (McManus, 2020). MoLI's captions demonstrate active, present tense language (Hanks, 2021), intended to encourage visitors to be curious and attentive beyond the museum's walls. One caption is worth referencing in full:

"Today, Dublin remains as strange and musical as Joyce's characters.  
We love speech, we love words – everybody is talking most of the time.  
So when you leave our museum, remember you are stepping into  
Joyce's Dublin, surrounded by his Dubliners" (Dear, Dirty Dublin).

Similarly, the MoLI gift shop which features a large selection of books and arts and crafts by local artists, is seen as an extension of the museum (MoLI Interview with M.). They see it as an opportunity to highlight authors and artists who do not figure in the exhibits, as well as to provide a potential action point and inspiration for people before they leave. What sells also reflects whether exhibits are engaging with people's imaginations.

## **2.2. *Transparent Narratives***

As literary museums, GWL and MoLI are especially equipped to openly present the development and ongoing work of curating the museum's narrative and subsequently the understanding of history as a discourse and social construct. Lowe (2015) gives the example of the Emily Dickinson Museum which "reveals the staff not as arbiters of fact, but as individuals engaged in the work of presenting a story about" the author, including shifting perceptions in academic and popular thought (p. 47). Anderson agrees and articulates that museums should not be afraid to explore "a world where truth and fiction" coexist (Anderson, 2023, p. 1). In keeping with this, one of MoLI's (2018) values is, like creatives, to have the "courage to experiment" and as part of this to try, fail, learn, and try again (p. 1). It was also apparent from interviews that MoLI's leadership value having staff from different educational backgrounds and demographics, creating a foundation for

fresh and varied insight (Interview with J. and M.). In the exhibits, instead of dichotomising the author's life and their work, "truth" and "fiction" are mingled in a 3D map of Dublin in Joyce's time which mixes quotes and events from his own life with those of his fictional characters and how both of them have influenced and been influenced by the city. In the same room, Joyce's timeline asks visitors to consider why we celebrate one individual and dedicates a significant amount of space to biographies of the people who inspired Joyce and made his work possible intellectually and financially, professionally and personally. Without explicitly saying so, it critiques the romanticised view that writers and artists in general are solitary geniuses. MoLI has also acknowledged how written stories are the "tip of the iceberg" and that there is reawakened interest in perpetuating oral storytelling (Into the Island, 2022). The exhibit brought awareness to the work of Storytellers of Ireland/Aos Scéal Eiréann and the National Folklore Collection in UCD. It explored folklore as not only a meaningful form of entertainment but also as integral to Irish history and identity, and finally how and why it has been disregarded or oppressed form of expression and means of remembrance in the past, including by museums. By concluding with how oral storytelling continues to be important for remembering and recording more recent history such as the Irish Civil War, it acknowledges the potential for visitors to share and even record their own stories.

GWL's narrative practices are made transparent through their aim to "pioneer new ideas of, and approaches to, culture and heritage that bring together people from the most diverse backgrounds" as well as the objective to encourage women to contribute "to the documentation, collection, creation and use of materials" (GWL, n.d. Aims). In the same way, the fluid nature of language and literacy is nurtured by the reflexive approaches engrained in GWL's policies. Their growth from an arts hub to a community library, museum, and archives demonstrates their willingness to adapt to the needs and patterns they see reflected locally and more generally in the cultural moment. They present resources and events to the community following public requests, and practice a collective, reflexive way of articulating heritage through the archiving of objects and writing created during workshops, as well as by requesting book donations on specific, relevant topics depending on the gaps in their collection. Such practices not only create a window into their processes but a symbiotic relationship between the visitor and the museum (GWL, n.d.b.). Meanwhile, events like Reading the Stirling Castle, emphasise the value and potential of looking at the past through the lens of those not traditionally

associated with or connected to a space and to intersect branches of study. For example, participants explored the etymology of words such as “fortress”, which is feminine, and ended their visit by writing a collaborative poem of their perspective of the castle (Brown, 2024, para. 11). The experience initiated by GWL staff and hosted by Stirling Castle was, as Brown further expressed, an invaluable way to consider how the presence of diverse women pushes “up against recorded histories of who can be heard and where” (para. 1). It simultaneously critiques the authorised narrative and presents new ones.

In an interview on the podcast *Wild for Scotland* (2022, May 2), GWL’s co-founder, Adele Patrick, described how the library defies definition; “it doesn’t feel like a normal library; it doesn’t feel like a normal museum or archive”. What constitutes “normal” is subjective and influenced by a variety of socio-economic and cultural factors but Adele’s emphasis on the limitations of the name “Glasgow Women’s Library” suggests that its scope is difficult to encapsulate, especially by the traditional functions associated with libraries and museums. Rather than viewing the struggle to define themselves as a limitation, it is viewed as an invitation to continually redefine, while upholding foundational policies. Firstly, while certainly rooted in and shaped by Glasgow and in the last decade, by the Bridgeton neighbourhood, the GWL also engages nationally through outreach programmes and partnerships (Interview with M.), and with “sister organisations world-wide” especially women’s museums, including one in Germany, although its name and location were not specified (para. 8; Interview with M.). Secondly, while their archives and library specialises in women’s history and writing, and is a space created by and for women to “redress sexism, discrimination, and misogyny” (GWL, n.d.f. sec. 3) and to use storytelling and learning to “champion [women’s] historical, cultural and political contributions” (GWL, 2024, March, p. 4), it subsequently endeavours to be an inclusive space for “all gender and sex identities” (GWL n.d.f. sec. 3). Thirdly, like a traditional library and museum, there is a collection of books that can be borrowed and returned, and exhibits, events, and literacy resources for a variety of ages, but its social policies and thus the trajectory of the space are directed towards being a community “catalyst” that empowers people to find and confidently share their voice (GWL, 2024b, p. 4).

### **3. How do literary museum staff understand and implement policies that are co-creative?**

### 3.1. *Future Focused*

GWL and MoLI view themselves as ongoing stories interconnected with those on a local and global scale. Unlike MoLI, GWL did not begin primarily as a literary history space or have a collection focused on any particular author but literature and literacy in its various forms are viewed as integral to their goal to empower people. Both frame education as “lifelong learning”, something that is endless and which is done together. This framing removes a sense of superiority and encourages curiosity on both the side of the teacher and student, such as demonstrated by the ALN Team at GWL and through the Edna O’Brien Bursary at MoLI.

Rather than their policies being words of “complacency” and an end in themselves, they represent commitment to change through regular evaluation and active listening (Nightingale and Mahal, 2012, p. 14). The language used in their vision and values statements expresses momentum forward, initiative, and prioritisation of social justice and global citizenship. For example, one of GWL’s aims is to “be a *catalyst* for change by *taking a lead role* in redressing the neglect of women’s historical and cultural contributions to Scottish society” and to “address issues of social exclusion and marginalisation” (italics added, GWL, n.d.b., para.15). Similarly, MoLI (2018) states their belief “in the *power of literature* to divine the very heart of diverse human experiences” and “are *ambitious* for a similar equality of outcome in all aspects of our work” (italics added, print). The library, archives, literary events, and literacy resources paired closely with engagement are passionately viewed as the means to this end.

In keeping with this, HOMESWEETHOME, an event hosted by MoLI, and the ULYSSES European project as a whole, provides a remarkable example of literature being utilised to make connections with the past and integrating it into conversations about the present and future. Literature is revealed to have weight on scales such as international relations and policy writing, ultimately serving as a neutral meeting ground, conversation starter, inspiration, and a means of articulating the human experience and the future. At GWL, similar language is used through their continual and visible call for visitors to “make the library your own” and “help us decide what its future should be” (Kamleitner, 2022, May 2). Meanwhile events like *Údar agus Agallamh: Ailbhe Ní Ghearbhuigh* at MoLI and Story Café, Conversation Café, and others at GWL focus on language and keeping oral tradition and mother tongues alive for future generations. It is an ambitious yet grounded approach.

### 3.2. *Creating and Nurturing Opportunity*

Lastly, and closely connected to being future focused, GWL and MoLI are innovators that bridge the worlds of museums and libraries, and literature and personal stories, with the goal of presenting storytelling as empowerment. Both museums seek to introduce people to experiences, content, and opportunities they would never get a chance to otherwise, whether or not they are literature related. GWL founder Adele Patrick and the MoLI Head of Learning and Culture discussed how they felt they got into their careers on a “fluke” or how instrumental others were in sparking interest and encouraging engagement in their field of work. In light of these personal experiences, both museums want to provide that “fluke”, especially for more vulnerable groups such as the working class, migrants, and underprivileged youth. Many participants have faced significant challenges, such as trauma, poverty, or displacement, and programmes are tailored to meet these intersectional needs, making literacy an integral means of giving them a platform to articulate themselves (ALN interview). Both museums nurture environments which people wish to regularly return to for reoccurring or new events, but they also equip participants to find confidence, connections and passions beyond the GWL and MoLI buildings. The individual’s wellbeing is at the centre of both museums’ vision and mission.

GWL uses collaborative language to describe their own origin-story, referring to the space as a “multi-voiced haven” (n.d. Our History, para. 5) and acknowledging the “thousands of women” who have contributed to the growth and success of the library (para. 4). Premised as a symbiotic relationship, there is consistent invitations for feedback and resulting action points such as through focus groups at MoLI and regular anonymous feedback forms at GWL which are passed around after the majority of events. The information is processed for funding purposes and summarised in their Strategic Plan (Interview with J.; GWL, 2024, Strategic Plan, p. 10). Another form of feedback and empowerment which also provides a public look into the museum’s workings is the GWL blog where volunteers are regularly invited to share their reflections. One in particular writes about how she began regularly attending Story Café and was commissioned by GWL to post reviews of and highlights from various events, stating proudly that, "at the age of 78 I became a blogger and what fun that has been!" (GWL, 2023, para 4). GWL and MoLI have also both noticed the need for discussions of “socio-economic class” and specifically to prioritise working class narratives, which museums have historically

overlooked or been uncomfortable exploring (Nightingale and Mahal, 2012, p. 34). GWL's Story Café often features working class literature, and MoLI's exhibits include working class journals. After the GWL Reading the Stirling Castle event, one participant reflected on how they had "never thought of visiting a castle before", but that they would go again and "do it in my own way" (qtd. In Brown, 2024). They were empowered by the facilitator and the group to engage with a place that was foreign to them and to make it their own, as well as to consider returning or engaging with other, similar historic sites.

The Head of Learning and Culture at MoLI suggests that policy is useless if not rooted in a practice of active listening and relationship building (Interview with J.). This perspective was mirrored throughout my correspondence with the GWL staff, who showed great care as they turned my questions about themselves towards the experience of learners (Interview with ALN Team). For example, when I asked, "what are the greatest challenges of your work?" they answered by focusing on the greatest challenges faced by participants, which shows respect and care for the people they engage with through their work. They also acknowledged the importance of taking the time to build relationships of trust as part of this process. The individual's "*needs*", or the task they request help with, may be different than their "*wants*" and the latter is just as important in the learning process. For example, a woman requested help with filling in forms, but what she wanted was to "study ancient Rome and feel confident enough to travel the world". The distinction made between "*wants*" and "*needs*" is not always so easily dichotomised but in the case of this individual it reveals the wholistic approach of the ALN Team to consider the person in their entirety rather than as someone defined by their need. It is safe to presume that during their meetings, they engaged in conversations about unrelated topics and once the initial goal of the meetings was fulfilled, an underlying interest or another question they wanted to explore was revealed. The ALN team's adaptability, patience, and environment of trust creates space for these discoveries and their policies give them the freedom to continue supporting and cheering on visitors on an individually unique level.

Lastly, another reoccurring characteristic is that nurturing an environment of opportunity is not just about how staff engage with visitors but also about how staff engage with each other and how they are treated and invited by executive staff to contribute to the workings of the museum through regular staff meetings and work across departments (Interview with J.). The Edna O'Brien Award and EIRSAT-1 satellite poetry

project at MoLI and the Teenage Kicks, Open Book, and Story Café at GWL demonstrate synergy between staff, researchers, artists, professions, and the community. They approach their work as lifelong learners or simultaneously mentors and students. GWL offers consulting for other museums and community groups who wish to create similar programmes or are interested in mimicking their policies and practices, and both GWL and MoLI consistently express their intention to learn from and collaborate with other people and organisations in order to develop their services.

## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The underlying thread evident through all my observations and interactions was the contagiously hopeful and positive attitude exuded by both staff and participants at GWL and MoLI despite financial setbacks and limitations. It revealed the passion with which staff engage with their work and the receptiveness and mirrored passion with which participants respond. The reason for such a response, is, at least in part, due to the practice of working transparently and inviting visitors to contribute to the museum's narrative. Despite working with the constraints of historic buildings, the museum spaces are framed by accessibility and are intentionally multipurpose. They are transparent about the processes of interpreting literature and the relevant history, as well as seek to engage with the local and global community, highlighting, critically engaging with and hosting voices both in and outside the literary canon, whether in their archives or contemporary. Literacy museum staff implement policies that are collaborative by being attentive listeners to the needs of individuals and communities around them, and regularly reevaluate their strategic plans. Such practices are fuelled by the desire to break class barriers, include marginalised voices, and focus on holistic and intersectional approaches to literature and literacy. The high demand for their literacy services is testament to their value as well as essential role in their respective communities.

Given the geographical constraints of my research, it would be interesting for future studies to consider patterns of general literary museums in more depth and to conduct more case studies across Europe as well as beyond the Western context. It would also be valuable to return to the topic once more substantial surveys on the impacts of Covid-19 on literacy are published. Ultimately, GWL and MoLI are overlooked innovators in the literary museum sector in part because they are difficult to define, being more than one type of space and harbingers of the "post-museum". By prioritising making general literary museum spaces homelike for the current visitor before that of the writers represented, it creates exciting opportunities for engagement, becoming not primarily about where an author once sat or wrote, but rather about where the visitor is invited to sit, speak, write, and contribute.

## **APPENDIX A: EMAIL PROPOSAL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH (GWL)**

7 March 2024

Hello,

I visited the Glasgow Women's Library for the first time over a year ago and was so inspired by the safe and welcoming environment. The visit was organised by Dr. Margaret McColl, the director of my masters in Education in Museums and Heritage at the University of Glasgow. Since then, I have continued following your work through your newsletter. I have recently returned to Glasgow to write my dissertation and while my research and methodology are still in the beginning stages, I wanted to connect to see if I could include the Glasgow Women's Library as a case study.

My research question, which is subject to revision, is as follows: In what ways do literary museums serve as hybrid spaces and facilitate participatory action through the exploration of narrative and marginalised voices in literary history?

Concepts I would like to explore in connection to this include literacy, educational and community engagement practices, and the use of narrative and storytelling.

My timeline for research is from March to June, and if comfortable with my proposal, I would like to spend time consistently in the library and exhibit space making general observations while studying, and after making connections, conducting three to four interviews with staff and/or volunteers involved in educational, archival, and library services. I am flexible with people's interview preferences (either in person or over email).

If there is also the possibility of participating in some upcoming events and workshops, that would be an incredible addition to my work. My supervisor also suggested I ask if volunteering would be an option as part of my research, something I am more than willing to discuss!

If you have any questions, please let me know.

I look forward to hearing from you!

Sarah

## **APPENDIX B: EMAIL PROPOSAL TO CONDUCT RESEARCH**

### **(MoLI)**

7 March 2024

Hello,

I visited the Museum of Literature Ireland for the first time over a year ago and profoundly enjoyed the exhibits (especially the temporary exhibit, Into the Island) and felt welcomed by the staff. I also recently became a member and am following your work through your newsletter. As a masters student in Education in Museums and Heritage at the University of Glasgow, I am writing my dissertation on literary museums, and while my research and methodology are still in the beginning stages, I wanted to connect to see if I could include MoLI as a case study.

My research question, which is subject to revision, is as follows: In what ways do literary museums serve as hybrid spaces and facilitate participatory action through the exploration of narrative and marginalised voices in literary history?

Concepts I would like to explore in connection to this include literacy, educational and community engagement practices, and balancing the exploration of canonical works with "other" narratives and voices.

The timeline for my research is March to June, and if you are comfortable with my proposal, I would like to make two visits (each 2-3 days between April and June)<sup>2</sup>, to make general observations in the exhibits and library and conduct interviews with 2-3 staff and/or volunteers involved in education, curation, or events. I am also flexible with people's interview preferences (either in person or over email).

If there is also the possibility of participating in a couple of upcoming events (I would plan my visits accordingly), that would be an incredible addition to my work.

If you have any questions, please let me know.

I look forward to hearing from you!

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<sup>2</sup> Quickly amended to one visit of one day which was more financially feasible for me and accommodating of the MoLI staff's busy schedules.

Sarah

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8 May 2024

Hi J.,

Thank you for your hospitality at MoLI on Friday and for taking time out of your busy schedule to share a bit about your work with me (and for the links)! Please also pass on my thanks to M. for her time as we chatted for a while afterward! The First Friday events were also lovely.

I'm in the process of organising my notes and may be in touch with a few more questions.

Whatever the case, I look forward to sharing my work with you and staying in touch.

Sarah

## **APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR ADULT LITERACY AND NUMERACY TEAM (GWL)**

3 June 2024

Hello,

I am a masters student in Museum Education at the University of Glasgow and I met with R. a few weeks ago to discuss my research on participatory learning in literary museums. After I expressed interest in learning more about GWL's outreach and literacy support/lifelong learning approach, they recommended I contact you. I read your bios on the GWL website, and it was exciting and encouraging to see how passionate you are about your work!

I know you are all incredibly busy so instead of trying to coordinate a meeting I am sending you my questions to answer in your own time. With that said, I visit the library regularly so I can easily make time to sit down and discuss them in person. If the answers to these questions are already on the website, feel free to direct me to the info I have missed rather than answer them (again, I want to be respectful of your time).

- Do people come to GWL searching specifically for tutoring/assistance with tasks or are they usually already involved with GWL and become aware of your team?
- What are some of the most requested services?
- Have the demographics or patterns of participants changed over the years? If so, how have you adapted your services?
- What are the greatest challenges you currently face in your roles?
- What are you most excited about in your roles moving forward?

I look forward to hearing from you and receiving any information you can share.

If you have any questions about my research, please feel free to ask.

Take care,

Sarah

## **APPENDIX D: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR NATIONAL LIFELONG LEARNING DEVELOPMENT WORKER (GWL)**

I met with M. in person on 19 June 2024.

- What is the process of building partnerships with organisations? Are there criteria for who you decide to work with?
- How does the physical library in Bridgeton impact and support your work when on the road? Or while preparing to go on the road?
- What is the most common type of event, programme, or workshop you organise?
- Can you share information on the demographics of participants?
- What is the greatest challenge(s) you face in your role?
- What is something you are excited about in your role moving forward?

## APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR MoLI STAFF

Semi-structured interview questions for the Head of Learning and Culture:

### Intro Questions

- Can you tell me about yourself (where you're from, your educational background, etc.)?
- How long have you been the head of Learning and Culture at MoLI and what led you to apply?
- What are the best and most challenging aspects of the position?
- How would you define learning and culture in connection to your role? *Only ask if this hasn't been covered in earlier responses.*

### MoLI Overview

- What keywords would you use to describe MoLI?
- How would you describe MoLI's neighbourhood?
- What makes MoLI unique from, for example, the old Dublin Writer's Museum or James Joyce Centre?

### Visitor Engagement/Exhibits

- Can you give a brief overview of the various museum spaces?
- What kinds of events/forms of engagement are organised by your team and you?
- Who are your main visitors/participants? Age, demographics, etc.
- Are there any patterns, changes, or surprises with how visitors engage with the museum?
- What is working and what could be done differently in terms of events and engagement?
- I see an emphasis on representation in MoLI's exhibits (oral storytelling, Gaelic, women authors, LGBTQ+ tours, etc). How does the museum balance highlighting canonical authors and people who are less well known?
- How do you/your team approach making literature accessible/immersive (*words used on the website*)?

- *Reference new ICOM museum definition.* Are there any terms or phrases that reflect MoLI's outreach goals?

### **Closing Questions**

- What featured authors have you read? Do you have a favourite? Do you feel there is anyone under-represented?
- Is there an event or exhibit you are looking forward to?
- Is there anything else you would like to share?

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