LITERARY GEOGRAPHIES

Postcards from the Old Country: Finessing the Landscape to Fit our Fables

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Abstract:
This paper begins with a call to extend the remit of the literary text to include formats beyond the printed page in exploring the fictions of our lives. Taking as its text the picture postcard, the piece focusses on the innovative work of postcard publisher John Hinde and his highly choreographed images of the 1960s. An outline of the popular appeal of Hinde's cards, and the fictive spaces they depicted, is followed by a close examination of a subset of Hinde's Irish postcards to demonstrate how and why these carefully staged productions and reproductions of home appeared comfortingly familiar to diasporic descendants revisiting the Old Country. The close parallels of these journeys with those of the travels of literary tourists to storybook spaces are discussed to show how, whether in search of a place recognisable from the pages of a novel or from the fables of forebears, such travellers are drawn towards a connection with their nostalgic past and with themselves. Through the sense of belonging generated through the medium of Hinde's fictive vision of bygone Ireland, roots tourists were thus enabled to define and refine their hyphenated cultural identities back in the contemporary realities of the New World.

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Introduction

Storywriters fabricate imaginary places which they people with their fictional characters. Such fictive spaces can be mapped onto actual physical sites and these landscapes attract literary tourists keen to walk the ways of their fictional heroes. Squire (1991, 1994) explores the spaces of Beatrix Potter, for example, while Fawcett and Cormack (2001) consider the imaginary geographies of place conjured up by Lucy Maud Montgomery. In the work of a 1960s postcard publisher, I find a similar reproduction of spaces imagined through the family fables of the roots tourists returning to their ancestral homelands to walk the ways of their own forebears. This comparison may appear outlandish. How can the products of a novelist's imagination and their actions in spaces landscaped for dramatic purpose be likened to reminiscences of once-living people and to the photographic representations of the real locations in which they dwelled? In this paper I aim to address this question and to show how both literary travellers and diasporic descendants seek lost times grounded in places which are inevitably fictitious.

I contend that if we accept that literary geographies explore imagined worlds, then we can extend the understanding of the literary text from the pages of novels, memoirs and other writings, to other formats. Here, referencing Daniels and Rycroft's 'field of textual genres—the novel, the poem, the travel guide, the map, the regional monograph—with complex overlaps and connections' (1993: 460), and Rossetto's assertion that 'texts should be researched for their added value' (2014: 524), I make the case for a consideration of the picture postcard as a geographical imaginary to be viewed alongside the works more commonly examined by literary geographers.

Human geographers have long used literature in their work 'as evocative and accurate depictions of place… [and] to add flavour and depth to geographical descriptions of landscape' (Johnson 2004: 91). Ridanpää provides a detailed account of the development of literary geography and holds that the field was held back by the text being perceived only as a 'mimetic depiction of how reality 'really' is' (Ridanpää 2010: 48; for earlier reviews of the field, see Hones 2008; Squire 1994). Encouraged by the growing 'spatialization' of literary studies, 'symptomatic of a more general resurgence of interplay between geography and the humanities in both the academic and public realms' (Rossetto 2014: 513; see also Alexander 2015: 3), recent decades have seen mimetic and metaphorical approaches exhausted and literary geography subjected to 'some profound epistemological transformation' (Saunders 2010: 437). Here there is much common ground between the traditional approaches to both the literary and the photographic text (and hence the picture postcard).

Rooted in the earliest traditions of geographical scholarship and exploration and photographic representations, some researchers have prized the picture postcard as an apparent mirror of actuality. Take, for example, Sawyer and Butler (2006) on the card as an historic record in studies of environmental change, or Arreola and Burkhart's (2010: 886; see also DeBres and Sowers 2009: 217; Waitt and Head 2002: 320) investigations of changing urban landscapes, via re-photography methods using historic imagery (Klett 2006) and

personal archives of past photographs (Vergara 2009). However, with the possible exception of Yi- Fu Tuan, Hoelscher finds that geographers' use of photography in an academic approach to landscape 'has remained curiously peripheral' (Hoelscher 1998: 548), unlike those in other fields who have shown greater interest in engaging with photographs as primary sources. (Anthropologists in particular have made use of the photograph and/or the picture postcard in their research, see Albers and James 1988; Banta and Hinsley 1986; Edwards 1992; Geary and Webb 1998). As Arreola and Burkhart remark, although visual representations of place and landscape 'have long been central to the development of geographic knowledge … the history of the photograph as a recognized source of geographic data is relatively brief given the long history of the geographic discipline' (2010: 886), which is surprising 'within a discipline that has long been conceptually and practically dependent upon technologies of the visual' (Schwartz and Ryan 2003: 4).

However, here as in literary geographies scholars must contend with an over concentration on mythical mimesis. Many writers have reflected upon the apparent infallibility of the product of the mechanical recording device - this 'seemingly perfect marriage of science and art… the ideal medium for nature to copy herself with utter accuracy and exactitude (Hoelscher 1998: 548; see also Arreola and Burkhart 2010: 886; Banta and Hinsley 1986: 23; Burns 2004: 269; Edwards 1997: 60; Markwick 2001: 420; Schwartz and Ryan 2003; Stevenson 2013: 302; Van Eeden 2014: 81; Waitt and Head 2002: 324). As in literary geographies, the mimetic attributes of the photograph (and by extension the picture postcard) also held back academic examination of the geographies of the visual image. Led by anthropologists including Albers and James (1988), Alloula (1987), Banta and Hinsley (1986), Geary & Webb (1998) and Schor (1992), it was not until around the start of the twenty first century that geographers began to recognise that these 'technologies of representation' (Crang 1999: 252) or 'travelling landscape-objects' (della Dora 2009: 335) merited a closer inspection in terms of their shifting agencies as 'souvenirs, vehicles of communication, collectible commodities of several kinds, and objects for research and critical analysis as markers of the society that produced them' (Nordström 1999: 93).

Overlaid with changing values and meanings as it travels through space and time, the picture postcard is both a visual and a written text enmeshed within a tangle of flows between the sites of its capture, creation and multiple receptions, together with questions of upon 'whose terms the reality had been written' (Ridanpää 2010: 51). As an outcrop of popular culture, the card is thus 'an inherently political medium' with much to contribute (DeBres and Sowers 2009: 217; see also Waitt and Head 2002; Yüksel and Akgül 2007). In this the card has similarities with the moving picture and hence it occupies a middle ground between the page of the literary geographer and the screen of the film scholar. Connell's view that film contains 'narratives and attributes that appeal to the emotions of the reader or viewer, and emphasise the interconnections between people, plot and place' (Connell 2012: 1011), can also be applied to the picture postcard, for although 'moving images are different to those experienced through reading, which [are] dependent on the imagination for being

brought to life' (1011), in each case, devotees of the fiction – however reproduced – follow the storylines into an imagined geography overlaid on actual place.

Literary works stimulate readers to see the sites themselves (Connell 2012: 1011; Herbert 2001). The spaces of literature have long been noted as destinations 'within the context of homage, pilgrimage and education' (Robinson 2002: 4). Just as the emerging middle classes of the Victorian age modelled their leisure travel on the Grand Tour once reserved for the elite - those with 'the cultural capital to appreciate and understand this form of heritage' (Herbert 2001: 314) - so the tropes of literary tourism filter down from above. John Urry traces an ongoing link between the contemporary popularity of the English Lake District and the historic place-images and place-myths, reflected in the works of the Lake poets of the early to mid-nineteenth century and emphasised by its contextualisation within the Cumbrian landscape (Robinson 2002: 5).

Squire claims that 'travel writers, whether deliberately or unconsciously, serve as cultural brokers, appropriating a landscape and its people, and re-interpreting them for new audiences' (Squire 1991: 6) and in so doing create and disseminate the place's identity (Connell 2012: 1013; Johnson 1999: 194). Many scholars have debated how, in a similar fashion, the image interprets the landscape for the viewers, showing them what to see (Albers and James 1984; Dann 1996; Edwards 1997; Urry 1995; Waitt and Head 2002: 320); how to gaze (Cosgrove 1984; Crawshaw and Urry 1997; Frow 1997; Markwick 2001); and how to replicate their sight to verify their prescripted knowledges (Crang 1996: 438; Jenkins 2003: 306). With the publication of the image spaces are transformed from sites to signed sights, from place to 'places' as 'social, cultural and textual ideas, signifying systems and their representations' (Ridanpää 2010: 50). This means that, given the networks through which these texts circulate, 'the symbolic values of a product (in this case, a landscape, place or setting) often have greater appeal to the consumer than the product itself' (Connell 2012: 1013). Ultimately it is 'the act of taking a photograph or buying a picture postcard on holiday [which] effectively serves to represent and signal the genuineness of the touristic experience' rather than any authentic encounter with the place (Hoelscher 1998: 549; MacCannell 1999: 45; Sontag 1977: 9). This means that the perceived authenticity of the tourist's experience is a measure of the extent to which the actual spaces mirror the imaginative distillation of space into a small collection of culturally crafted iconic sites. With regard to this process, Fawcett and Cormack provide an overview of the scholarly discussions of the resulting tensions between the visitors' search for the real and the hosts' cultural production of the realistic (Fawcett and Cormack 2001: 688; on the social construction of space, see the scholarship loosely clustered around imagined geographies of place - for example, Albers and James 1988: 141, 154; Daniels 1992; Gregory 1994, 1995; Hoelscher 1998; Jackson 1994; Nordström 1999: 94; Saïd 1978; Waitt and Head 2002: 320).

Such 'places' reflect the ideas and belief systems of their makers and users (Albers and James 1988: 141; Jackson 1994; Nordström 1999: 80; Rose 2000: 555; Waitt and Head 2002: 320, 324; Wylie 2007: 94-5). Hence, as in the literary site, the picture postcard represents the

mute ideological dialogues of a society, 'reproducing and enhancing its preferred images while appearing to present entirely accurate representation' (Crawshaw and Urry 1997: 182). Out of these ideas and beliefs comes emotion. Lando analyses landscapes with regard to 'behavior, sensations, ideas, feelings, hopes, and faith' (Lando 1996: 10) and it is the imprint of these upon the place of the picture postcard, the 'stories these 'mutable things' might allow us to tell' and 'the people, objects and practices that are required to make them work' (Cameron 2012: 578) that is the focus of this paper. In other words, I seek to discover how the coincidence of personal narratives, fantasy geographies and material practices found in the mass-reproduced postcard generates an authoritative storied object, is capable of validating the identity of a diasporic descendant. In doing so I aim to show what a study of the picture postcard – this 'superb vehicle of cultural mythology' (Hoelscher 1998: 549) - owes, and can contribute to, the field of literary geography.

The fictions of the picture postcard

The picture postcard is many things - a kitsch souvenir, a prized reminder of an absent loved one, a bygone curio – but above all it is a text, a multi-agency object which offers insights into 'the flows and elisions between the textual and the spatial' (Saunders 2010: 437). With the novel as with the postcard, for it is the highly stylised visual vocabulary of a particular tranche of the work of one postcard publisher – John Hinde – and its influence on perceptions of place that I examine in this paper. I begin by introducing the picture postcard then move on to deconstruct the family fables, before addressing the question of why these particular envisionings of Ireland struck such a chord with a specific cohort at a particular time in the mid-twentieth century.

First, a brief look at the history of the picture postcard to set the scene for the market into which publisher John Hinde introduced his cards in the late 1950s. Although the first postcard was sent in 1870, it took until the 1890s for the various national postal authorities to permit the inclusion of an image on a card but this illustrated novelty quickly became a wildly popular travelling landscape object. In 1903, 600 million postcards were dispatched in Great Britain (Rogan 2005: 4) leading the Glasgow Evening News to fear that in 'ten years Europe will be buried beneath picture postcards' (Holt and Holt 1971: 148; see also DeBres and Sowers 2009: 217; Gillen 2013: 490; Stevenson 2013: 301). Two main factors account for this early twentieth century popularity – utility and display.

With the rise in mass literacy ('most people could jot down a few words on a card, even if a formal letter was beyond their skills' (Phillips 2000: 13)) and the introduction of unified national postal services offering several deliveries a day, the postcard provided a speedy way of conveying short messages – the forerunner of the telephone call, the mobile phone text, the digital email and so on. The postcard postage rate, half that of a letter, added to its attraction.

In terms of display, the interlinked social and cultural changes throughout the West ushered in by the Industrial Revolution – the rise of the middle class and the availability of

spare resources with which to consume – and the burgeoning of the European empires – the urge to catalogue and classify exemplified by the Exhibitions of the nineteenth century – saw the democratisation of collecting as a pastime and as a demonstration of consumption. As steamship and railway networks expanded alongside innovations in photography and reprographics, the world became 'physically more within reach, photographs made it visually at hand… [generating] a profound multiplication of images and sights, an unprecedented geographical extension of the field of the visible' (Larsen 2006: 244; see Urry (2002: 148) on the tourist gaze – 'that peculiar combining together of the means of collective travel, the desire for travel and the techniques of photographic reproduction'). Whereas cabinets of curiosities had once been the preserve of the wealthy few, now the masses could find inexpensive albums with which to fill with stamps, postcards and the like. Although the popularity of the postcard collection declined after the First World War, the entrenched practices of buying and sending these travelling representations of place continued.

It was into this market that John Hinde came. A Dublin-based photographer, John Hinde (1916 – 1997) published his first postcards of Irish landscapes in 1957. They were an immediate success and by the mid Sixties he had acquired a team of staff photographers and a portfolio of touristic landscapes from all over the globe and claimed to be the largest postcard publisher in the world at that time. Hinde's cards stood out against the offerings of other publishers of the time in three ways.

First, Hinde, a fellow of the Royal Photographic Society, was highly technically skilled, particularly in the editing, colour processing and reproduction (Abadie and Beale n.d). He took a painstaking control of every stage of postcard production which resulted in a high quality image which stood out from those of his competitors.

Second, although his cards purported to be casual snapshots of happy holiday moments, Hinde's cards were anything but spontaneous. In fact, rather than *taking* photographs, John Hinde spoke of *making* them (Collins 2002). Having spent the Second World War producing photographic documentaries of life on the English home front, he was adept at carefully staging a scene in order to tell a story. He held that 'pictures should always convey a positive, good feeling, something which makes people happy' (cited in Abadie & Beale n.d) and so he aimed to reproduce the postcard place not as the visitor found it, but as they would have liked to have found it. Skies and seas were rendered blue (or else overprinted with luridly bright sunsets), boughs from convenient bushes were cut or bunches of flowers begged to screen unwanted obstacles from the shot,[1] and passers-by were choreographed into a performance of happy holiday-making – sunbathing, strolling, enjoying pony rides on the beach[2] or pointing with apparent delight at some distant sight. In so doing, Hinde reproduced a space already raised in the visitors' imaginations and reflected it back to them, to generate an instant nostalgia (his term) for the place almost attained. Rather than providing the 'visual prompts and locations for memories and stories' (Crang 1997: 367) as in Crang's mnemotechnology, Hinde's postcard images were actually pre-scripted narratives, commodified representations of place (Edwards and Hart 2004). As such, his photographic

cards were more renditions of fictions than representations of reality, imaginative creations of place rather than mechanical recordings of space, which viewers co-conspired to recognise as realistic. This raises the question of authenticity.

Even the most objective photographers filter their representations of the landscape through their own perceptions and predilections, meaning that photographs can never be 'innocent records… nor self-sufficient 'documents', but rely on supporting discourses in other pictures, in the knowledge brought to them by the viewer, or in texts around them' (Crang 1996: 434). Over and above this comes modernity's 'hegemony of vision… [whereby in] science, art and popular culture, vision has long been regarded as the noblest, most reliable and delightful of the senses' (Larsen 2006: 245). Even though we know that, far from reflecting the unmediated representation of the gaze, the photographic image is in fact the never-neutral, culturally constructed outcome of an 'active signifying practice in which those taking the photograph select, structure and shape what is going to be taken' (Urry 2002: 128), instinctively we trust the evidence of our eyes (Albers and James 1988; Berger 1972; Geary 1991; Naylor and Ryan 2010; Sontag 1977). Clearly what Hinde is reproducing is a form of staged authenticity (MacCannell 1973) whereby the postcard vision is a 'subjective experience, a combination of the developers' intentions, the consumers' interpretation, and the interactions among them' (Herbert 2001: 317).

Third, Hinde was a profit oriented publisher with a flair for showmanship gained during a post- War career in circus publicity and a stint running his own travelling show in Ireland. There is little on record about his life but the fact that he began to produce postcards when his circus failed and that he turned to painting, rather than photography, in retirement implies that the John Hinde Studio was essentially a commercially driven operation rather than an artistic endeavour. (In a 2013 interview, his daughter, Rosie Pernet Hinde, appears disinterested in the cards and their production, prizing his paintings rather than his photographic output).

However postcards have always been created as a response to the market rather than as an artform. It was pressure from nineteenth century publishers which led to the official acceptance of an image on a card and the panoply of scenes of unremarkable early twentieth century suburban streets derive from photographers seizing the opportunity to sell a postcard to every house in the road. From its earliest days, the picture postcard provided an instant, inexpensive alternative to the tourist's snapshot souvenir for taking photographs remained a relatively expensive and unpredictable occupation until the proliferation of digital technologies of recent decades. Postcard imagery has always aimed to replicate the actual or desired gaze of the visitors – the landscapes they would have liked to record - for if they did not appeal to the buyer then they remained on the rack. As a result, picture postcards 'produce and reproduce the imagined geographies of the social group or institution of which they were made' and thus offer a window on a particular space and time (Rose 2000: 555; see also Edwards 1992; Geary and Webb 1998; Markwick 2001: 420; Sidaway 2002: 95-6; Sontag 1977). John Hinde's careful setting of his scenes to appeal to his market thus provides a

fascinating imprint of the social and cultural values of the Sixties and the quotidian vacation practices of that period.

At the same time this emphasises the distinction between the real of the lived visitor's experience and the realistic of the tourist's postcards representation. The divide between fact and fantasy is yet more evident in a subset of Hinde's Irish portfolio. These cards – I use the term Old Country postcards to distinguish them from his Irish holiday resort scenes – were designed to appeal not to the traditional bucket and spade holidaymaker but to a different cohort of traveller. It is to these postcards I now turn.

The Old Country postcards

I begin this section by introducing the Old Country cards and show from where these imagining of Ireland came. I then move on to explain to whom these visions appealed and why.

Essentially, unlike his holiday scenes in which he invited visitors to imagine themselves alongside contemporary figures performing their vacations, John Hinde crafted a tableau of the Old Country, shrouded in a historic 'fuzzy, redeemingly benign aura' (Davis 1977: 418). In formats reminiscent of his Wartime story- telling documentary work, he reproduced an Ireland where donkey carts still had their place amidst the unhurried busyness of a land-based way of life.[3] Hinde 'bent over backwards to *construct* images of Irish landscape… objects were introduced to each image based on what the photographer felt *should* be present' (Zuelow 2009: 212; original emphasis) and the result was a carefully crafted 'non-existent rural idyll… the stereotype of a beautiful but backward country caught in a time warp' (Dunne 1997: 46; see also Foster 2008: 156). Hinde's Old Country was a homely country, a land of 'blue skies, red-haired colleens, donkeys and thatched cottages' (Sheridan and O'Leary 2005: 162), a triptych of vibrant rural landscapes, a gentler pace of life and friendly welcoming people.[4]

Why did he create this niche triangulation of scenery, stillness and simple folk set in a bygone time, one so distinct from the rest of his postcard imagery? In my interview with the photographer Martin Parr (who worked with him on a retrospective exhibition in 1991), Parr claimed that Hinde saw waves of roots tourists coming to Ireland in the 1960s, and so, spotting a market, he began to produce postcards which resonated with these travellers' imaginaries of the Old Country (Parr 2012). While I have not been able to corroborate this claim directly, the existence of a large Irish diaspora can certainly be charted as economic deprivation over the centuries led to mass emigration. Walter finds that while 3.5 million people lived in Ireland in 1890, a further 1.9 million Irish-born lived in America (Wright 2008: 85-6). Surges of further Irish out-migration in the 1920s and the 1950s reinvigorated and perpetuated Irish-American community life in the United States and King (2000) outlines how the development of the tourist industry, targeting America in particular, was a key strand in the late 1950s Irish economic. She cites the 1951 Christenberry Report, which

highlighted the landscape and the friendliness of the Irish people as key attractions, and finds its effect 'to be the formal establishment… of visual patterns and codes which would be used in the construction of images of Irish identity, the consequence of which has been a legacy of constantly recycled 'tourist imagery'' (15). Indeed a survey of visitors some fifty years later uncovers lyrical American descriptions of the attractions of Ireland as 'the land and the people, the fresh air, and the water' (Wright 2008: 88).

While Hinde was crafting his Old Country scenes, travel companies were promoting Ireland as 'an escape from the pressures of modernity' (Hughes and Allen 2010: 4). Negra cites a 1960s radio advertisement for the airline Pan Am in which

> a voiceover in hushed tones beckoned: The hills are as green as they've always been. Life is as quiet as it ever was. And time has a way of standing still. Let Pan Am take you there. (Negra 2001: 89, original emphasis)

Johnson reviews travel writers' accounts and finds that Ireland was regularly portrayed as being out of synchronization with the remainder of the 'western' world' (Johnson 2004: 94; Kneafsey 1998: 111) (Even Kerrygold – the national dairying umbrella organisation – played on these themes in advertising campaigns for overseas markets (Bolger 2012: 8)). Clearly Hinde was not the only one picking up on this strategic iconographic zeitgeist to capitalise on the diasporic pull to the Old Country.

While it was a state report which outlined the 'people, place and pace' (Wright 2008: 86) attractions of Ireland, this kernel of identity was grown on by those with little connection to the country (Johnson 1999: 191-2). Pan Am was an American airline and, due to the then inexperience of Irish designers, the marketing for Aer Lingus, the Irish national airline, was masterminded by designers from KLM (who went on to work for other key entities such as Bord Fáilte and Córas Iompair Éireann, the national public transport provider, hence 'many of the main protagonists in the construction of images representing a 'distinctive' Irish national identity were Dutch nationals' (King 2000: 16). The marketing for Irish butter was devised by a London advertising agency (Bolger 2012: 8) and Hinde himself came from a wealthy English family and employed two Germans – Elmar Ludwig and Edmund Nägele – as his main staff photographers. Thus it was architects from over the water who constructed, commodified and monetised the landscapes of Ireland, crafting the fabricated romanticised idyll which the visitors – themselves strangers too – sought. The Old Country was imagined by outsiders for outsiders. As such, it was a work of fiction.

So if the diasporic pull to Ireland was located amidst these carefully engineered fantasies, what about the push? Why did these imaginings strike a chord with the émigré Irish? Why did they seek to return – albeit briefly?

In the Sixties foreign holidays came within the reach of many more travellers than in previous decades due to the worldwide economic boom, the comparatively peaceful post-War political situation and the democratisation of air travel. But why did diasporic

descendants respond to the call to vacation in their ancestral homeland in particular? Outwardly, the conscious motivation of travellers may have been the coincidence of the fascination of finding their past (Wright 2008: 86) with the globalising flows of information and culture and the new enabling mobilities. Indeed transatlantic tourism campaigns encouraged visitors to think of their trip in terms of a homecoming ('the Irish-American's return, most likely for the first time… [was] a central feature of most tourist promotional films produced by and for the Irish American market during the 1950s and 1960s' (Rains 2003: 203; see also Connell 2012: 1023)). However, as Nash explains, 'an interest in ancestry always intersects with wider cultural processes, politics, and social concerns' (2002: 29) and it is these which are at the heart of the desire to go home.

Amongst them was the reaction to the exciting, but unsettling advances of the Long Sixties. Davis contends that 'rarely has the common man [sic] had his fundamental taken-for-granted convictions about man, woman, habits, manners, laws, society and God – i.e. entities of tremendous existential salience everywhere – so challenged, disrupted and shaken' (Davis 1977: 421). Other scholars find that the increasing speed of modernity and the dislocation of the social framework induces a hankering after a slower, gentler time which is elided with a place of belonging. Smith speaks of a destabilizing sense of homelessness, or apartness (Smith 2000: 515), while Pickering and Keightley talk of a 'relentless social uprooting and erosion of time-honoured stabilities' (2006: 22). Today we can see that the constant dislocations and the myriad opportunities of late twentieth/early twenty first century living leave us without a clear sense of who we are or where we belong. We have lost the certainties of the past, when the majority of us found our futures laid out for us from birth, dependent upon on where, when and to whom we were born. Instead we must grapple with an ongoing 'radical discontinuity in [our] sense of who and what [we] are' as the other side of the psychological coin to the rapid changes of the Sixties and thereafter (Davis 1977: 421). Then as now, the more fragmented and individualised society becomes the greater is the desire to find a secure point of anchorage and it is this longing for the rooted stability of a dwelling place to which John Hinde's Old Country postcards responded.

But in order to draft our understanding of who and what we are, we need a script, locatable in time and space, upon which to flesh out the *dramatis personae* of our past. From where do these returning visitors' stories come?

Family fables and identity

I contend that the diasporic descendants in search of the Old Country drew upon an auto literature, a suite of cherished family 'stories told by elderly relatives, senses of mortality, loss, nostalgia, and bereavement, nameless figures in old family photographs, letters in boxes of family memorabilia' (Nash 2002: 29). The telling and retelling of tales crystallised half remembered facts into warmly recalled fictions, enabling successive generations to negotiate their cultural allegiances between the discourses of the New World outside the home and the

narratives of the Old Country within. Each recounting of the stories re-crafted the original reminiscences and so re-shaped the cultural identification of displaced families. Casey writes of Swiss-Americans who furnish their homes with paintings of generic Swiss scenes set in places never known. He finds that these reproduction landscapes not only valorise the land their predecessors had left behind but they also engender a yearning for 'an entire world that was missed' (Casey 1987: 363). In the same way, these visitors to Ireland, many of whom were not the original migrants but rather their descendants, clung to a 'concept of a 'home' nation which is not only elsewhere but which is not directly and personally remembered' (Rains 2003: 197). It was this nostalgic vision of an Ireland unchanged since the family tales were first told which Hinde reproduced in his Old Country cards. A land which promised to remain comfortingly the same, a respite from the forces of modernity and a place which the by-now hyphenated descendants could visit 'to satisfy their souls' (Wright 2008: 88).

Travellers' trails: literary and ancestral

Having outlined the fictions of the Old Country, as reproduced in John Hinde's picture postcards, and referenced the cherished tales of those who journeyed in search of it, now I return to literary geographies and to the parallels between the geographical spaces of literature and those of family fables.

Just as literary travellers seek to re-imagine the lives of fictional characters and the landscapes in which they were created to dwell, so too do the roots tourists. While the latter search for signs of their forebears, the former venture to the sites of Beatrix Potter in the English Lake District (Squire 1991, 1994), for example, or the Canadian spaces created through the writings of Lucy Maud Montgomery (Fawcett and Cormack 2001). Aficionados of Anne of Green Gables navigate Prince Edward Island via Montgomery's stories (687; see also Larsen 2006: 247) and diasporic descendants followed the paths mapped out by the family stories. Some roots tourists resembled literary pilgrims who navigate by way of authors' grave or memorials (Herbert 2001), arriving equipped with detailed genealogical information to guide them to particular cemeteries and sites of commemoration. Others, more akin to literary tourists, based their journeys on the familiar narratives of the old tales, seeking more of an emotional connection to the time in which their ancestors lived rather than a physical encounter with the space which their forebears left. It is to these latter travellers that Hinde's Old Country cards were addressed.

Fawcett & Cormack claim that literary tourism is shaped by the intersection of biographical facts and real places associated with the author and fictional settings and characters imagined by the writer, meaning that 'authenticity involves a complex set of ideas and themes' (Fawcett and Cormack 2001: 687). Although the use of locatable places is often expedient in literature with the landscape tailored to fit the plot, literary tourists have signposted certitudes to guide them on their travels – the dates and spaces of the life of the author, for example, or a real life landmark, a version of which finds its way into the text. The line between fact and fantasy, although tangled, can still be drawn. How does this equate

to the diasporic descendants search for the Old Country? Again there is the interaction between the real and the imagined – an overlaying of genealogical facts and sites by fabled spaces and never-known actors. However, I find a double fiction in evidence here. First, there is the carefully crafted representation of an Ireland imagined by John Hinde and his contemporary image makers, a nostalgia-nuanced space and time that never did exist. Second, there are the family stories, redrafted through time to best fit the needs of each successive generation so that ultimately they too tell tales of times and spaces that never were. What results is a hermeneutic circle of fictions in which each fabricated text reinforces the other in turn. Roots tourists found the Hinde postcard imagery which most closely resembled their imagined Old Country and accepted it as validation of their stories of origin. Hinde in turn maximised sales by dispassionately manipulating his landscapes to comprise the tropes of Ireland which the tourists found most appealing. He scripted the universal stories of the local - the scenery, the gentle pace of life and the welcoming people – into idyllic pastoral images to fabricate a fictive sanctuary from modernity, an 'idealized Ireland, one that tourists inevitably wanted to remember' (Zuelow 2009: 210). It is the evocation of a soothing just-past time which is key, for while the cards purport to portray a place, the generic nature of the imagery and the vagueness as to the location (which increased as the years went by and which, given Hinde's attention to detail, must be deliberate) shows that the actual space depicted is less important than the sentiment it triggers. Instead of the *Wish you were here* celebration of the holiday resort images, the message of these Irish postcards is '*I wish I was there*' (210, emphasis added), back amidst the familiar fictions of the Old Country.

Literary tourists seek out the spaces of the story aware that they are the stage sets on which the author brought the characters to life. Followers of Sherlock Holmes seek out the wall plaque which marks 221B Baker Street in London, fully aware that the building did not exist when Conan Doyle began to write, for example (Herbert 2001: 316). We do not go to Prince Edward Island expecting to meet Anne Shirley but instead, through making a connection with the spaces of Montgomery's stories, to feel a nostalgic connection to our younger selves as we were when first captivated by her tales. We do not dwell on the sadnesses which brought her to Avonlea (as an orphan she was mistakenly sent to the Cuthbert household and, being a girl rather than the expected boy, not initially welcomed) but instead we enjoy the accounts of the happy quotidian life she went on to live in this rural backwater with the comforting assurance that all will be well in the end.

In the same way, roots tourists negotiate the overlaying of fiction upon fact in ancestral spaces, brushing away the dark actuality of what lies at the heart of the family histories in order to make way for the malleable happy-ever-after fictions of the old stories told around the new hearths. Émigrés tales are based on the recollections of those who left. As migrants generally travel in search of a better life, we would expect the family fables to tell of hardship, to paint the place in a harsh light – not in one to entice subsequent generations to return. Yet this overlooks the nature of memory which changes 'colour and shape… so far from being handed down in the timeless form of 'tradition' it is progressively

altered from generation to generation' (Samuel 1994: 25). That this is so is demonstrated by one of Hinde's Old Country postcards which depicts a large meadow in high summer. With a lake and then a mountain range in the background it is charming scene. However in the foreground a man is pictured laboriously raking in the hay with an antiquated horse drawn contraption, while a shawl clad woman drags up the stray grasses in this huge field with what appears to be a garden rake.[5] Rather than evidencing the un-mechanised, back- breaking, poverty-stricken labouring from which the emigrants escaped, *Glencar Lough in the Yeats Country, Co. Sligo, Ireland,* portrays this haymaking scene as a charming bucolic tableau, 'crafted, disciplined, and generic' (Cameron 2012: 574) and straight out of an ancestor's story.

These visitors to whom Hinde's postcards were addressed were not travelling to see the Ireland of the day and nor did they arrive equipped with geographies of ancestral suffering. Instead diasporic descendants re-mapped the spaces of origin not as sites of pain, but as fetishized sources of belonging, as times rather than places. Many migrants grapple with multiple, sometimes conflicting, cultural allegiances. They may 'regard, in varying degrees, homeland rather than the host [country] as a source of identity and values' (Hughes and Allen 2010: 2). This can result in an unsettling hyphenated (Ali and Holden 2006) or hybrid (Hickman et al 2005) ethnicity (Hughes and Allen 2010: 2), caught between the spatio-temporal reality of here – the New World - and the fuzzy fictions of there – the Old Country. Thus the return journey to Ireland allowed for the recovery of (apparently) authentic ancestral roots and engendered a 'sense of being 'at home' … rooted again in an ancestral homeland' (Higginbotham 2012: 199). As Wright finds, many Americans 'believe that "all will be revealed" if they can just put their feet on Irish soil'… [that this will] fill in some blanks for folks and make them feel more complete' (Wright 2008: 87-8).

Roots tourists search for a 'symbolic space of familiarity, comfort, security, and emotional attachment' (Antonsich 2010: 646; see also Marschall 2015: 38) as an anchorage from they can realise an identity in a society which offers myriad choices at every step. To discover who they are, they must construct a mirror image which reflects everything that they are *not* so that, by deduction, in negotiating this 'superimposition of two images' (Boym 2007: 7) they can see who they are and where they belong. Hence the hyphenated urbanites of the industrialised cities of the New World crafted imaginaries of their Others – their metaphorical Irish cousins, grounded in their land, and living purer, simpler, interdependent lives amidst the 'continuity, social cohesion and tradition' of the past (Boym 2001: 16) – and went in search of this Edenic state of belonging for which they yearned, 'fondly reconstructed out of selectively idealized features' (Pickering and Keightley 2006: 925). This Other place, earthed in some locatable space moulded to their desires in their imagination (Lowenthal 1979: 116) rendered the longed for state of belonging almost-attainable and realised the truth of the family fables.

Conclusion

The pilgrimages of roots tourists to their places of origin are less about locating a site and more about uncovering a nostalgic fictive existence as a refuge from quotidian modernity. The storied sights which John Hinde crafted provide tangible markers of imaginary sanctuaries, to be re-shaped and re-visited whenever desired.

The place, or more accurately the textual representation of the place, becomes a metaphor for the yardstick by which we measure our lives. It is no coincidence that it is the comforting pages of childhood classics that Squire and Fawcett and Cormack identify as drawing the literary tourist (2001: 690) and it is the spaces of the family fables, imbibed from earliest years, which attract the returning Irish visitors. We only seek out the sites of a story, whether fictional or familial, if that narrative has resonated with us. When an account strikes a chord with our experiences and aspirations, then it becomes part of us and the text becomes entwined with our memories of its performance and reception. We recall how we identified with Anne Shirley as a child, perhaps, or we remember the tales being told by now departed grandparents at long ago gatherings. This triggers connections to, and longings for, bonds with home and family (Herbert 2001: 315; Squire 1994) for it is not only the tales but also their telling which inspire our allegiance and affection.

By yearning for this selectively shaped past, we ground ourselves in a fetishized placement of our self- scripted identities (Davis 1977: 419, 422; Pickering and Keightley 2006: 922). The spot at which we ground our comforting fictions of a lost time becomes the place where we belong - we are 'at home in the past because it is our home — the past is where we come from' (Wright 2008: 86). John Hinde recognised this need for roots and his Old Country postcards are carefully encapsulated fictions of quasi-tangible places of emotional origin, raised in the imaginaries of an indelibly pre-scripted Ireland. His images scaled up the particular tales of the rural past to the broader cultural allegiances of contemporary migrant communities to reassure diasporic descendants of the actualities of their forebears' fictions. Hinde's images demonstrate the palimpsest of enduring meanings contained within an ostensibly ephemeral objective image-based object. More than (in fact, anything but) mimetic depictions of apparent past realities, these cards display a relational 'complex of production and reception spaces and practices, which irrevocably shape a text's geographies and meanings' (Saunders 2010: 437). The entangled spaces of the Old Country are the product of the fables of the no-longer present, voiced by *I wish I was there* yearnings and brought to life by the globalised and globalising re-enactment of a commodified storied past. As such they reshape both the land and the identities of the diaspora for whom it remains home, however tangentially connected. If these images are 'parts of practices through which people work to establish realities' (Crang 1997: 362), then a relational approach to these texts shows the potential of the picture postcard to work alongside the literary text in enabling the further exploration of the multiplicity of inter-related agencies and attributes of the landscape at every level from the personal to the global.

Acknowledgements

Notes

[1] See image 2_309, http://www.johnhindecollection.com/ireland10.html
[2] See image 2_259, http://www.johnhindecollection.com/ireland8.html
[3] See image 2_17, http://www.johnhindecollection.com/ireland1.html
[4] See image 2_482, http://www.johnhindecollection.com/ireland14.html
[5] See image 2_145, http://www.johnhindecollection.com/ireland5.html

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