

Postcard from Dublin

Maeve Connolly

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Postcards from Dublin tend to feature either candid shots of local 'colour'; pubs, Temple Bar, Irish 'characters' or more formal images of Georgian or Mediaeval Dublin. While Historic Dublin is apparently uncluttered by pedestrians, Temple Bar is teeming with bohemian young Europeans. The apparently informal images of Dublin's 'cultural and entertainment quarter' are a relatively new addition to the canon of established tourist 'sights'. The promotion of Temple Bar as Dublin's 'left-bank' has transformed the area from a low-rent, somewhat marginal, space to a desirable and exclusive address. This reinvention, which has taken place over a relatively short period of time, illustrates the exchange-value of 'heritage'. This incorporation of memories and narratives by the heritage industry for tourist consumption will inevitably influence the ways in which the city is imagined and experienced by residents.

Significantly, both tourism and photography are inseparable from memory. Professionally produced images structure both the expectations and the memories of tourists. Even though most holiday-makers produce their own photographs they continue to consume images in various ways. Photography has always been a part of the tourist experience; photographs provide evidence of a good holiday and 'sight-seeing' is often simply a means of gathering specific images. In 'Tourism and the Photographic Eye' Carol Crawshaw and John Urry address the fundamentally visual nature of the tourist gaze. They suggest that different gazes are 'authorised' by different, socially organised, discourses; such as those of *health, education and play*. They also distinguish between the 'romantic' gaze which privileges solitude and the 'collective' gaze which 'involves conviviality'. With the development of Temple Bar as a tourist attraction Dublin seems to have become the object of the collective tourist gaze; 'other people are necessary to give atmosphere to the experience of place'.¹

This theorisation of the 'tourist gaze' is informed by Foucault's investigation of ocular discipline. In the panopticon prison the individual is both the surveyor and the surveyed. Each inmate interiorises the gaze 'to the point that he is his own overseer...thus exercising this surveillance over and against himself'.² The all-seeing tourist gaze, according to Crawshaw and Urry, can be interiorised by locals living in a tourist 'honey-pot', 'creating a universal visibility which serves a

¹ Crawshaw, Carol and Urry, John (1997) 'Tourism and the Photographic Eye' in Rojek and Urry (ed.) *Touring Cultures: Transformations in Travel and Theory*, London: Routledge, p. 176-177.

² Foucault, Michel (1980) 'The Eye of Power', in C. Gordon (ed.) *Power/Knowledge; Selected Writings 1972-77*, New York: Pantheon, p. 155.

meticulous, rigorous, powerful eye'.³ In order to limit the effects of the tourist gaze local people may even engage in various forms of 'staged authenticity'; 'apparently authentic back-stages may be artificially created..in order to redirect the gaze'.⁴

1

Temple Bar, now one of the city's biggest tourist attractions, could be considered as a large-scale example of staged-authenticity. City-dwellers who have witnessed the transformation of the area from low-rent to high-fashion are to some extent complicit in its invented history. Many are aware that the apparently 'authentic' shop-fronts and painted facades are remnants of a big budget film set which transformed the appearance of Temple Bar in the early 1990's. Although the film itself (*Far and Away*, starring Tom Cruise and Nicole Kidman, both attempting 'Oirish' accents) was received as highly 'unauthentic', the sets were retained by popular demand and became part of the scenery of Temple Bar.

In this respect postcards of Temple Bar retain something of the quality of the 1950's John Hinde image of the Aran Island cottage. This picturesque cottage was photographed as a typical island dwelling despite the fact that it was apparently built during the filming of Flaherty's *Man of Aran*. Luke Gibbons, discussing the nostalgic quality of John Hinde's photography, notes that many of the landscapes feature a visual barrier; often flowers or foliage but in some cases a female figure. He compares this type of image to a 'back projection', operating 'almost as a flashback on another possible world'; a world of lost plenitude.⁵ As Gibbons notes, these postcards which once expressed a nostalgia for a rural arcadian past, are now the object of nostalgia themselves. It is of course possible that contemporary postcard images of Temple Bar, which trumpet Dublin's status as a thriving European city, may someday also become the object of nostalgia.

Carol Mavors refers to the process of collecting photographs as 'Collecting Loss'.⁶ Like Barthes she links photographs with death and with forgetting; 'the photograph is literally an emanation of the referent. From a real body which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me'.⁷ With the advent of digital photography this indexical relationship has obviously become less secure. As Susan Sontag notes, in this image-laded era photography not only influences our relationship with the past but also structures our way of dealing with the present; transforming it

³ Crawshaw and Urry, *op. cit.*, p.178.

⁴ *ibid.*, p.178.

⁵ Gibbons, Luke (1996) *Transformations in Irish Culture*, Cork: Cork University Press in association with Field Day Publications, p. 40.

⁶ Mavors, Carol (1997), 'Collecting Loss', in *Cultural Studies*11 (1), pp. 111-137.

⁷ Barthes, Roland (1981) *Camera Lucida*, New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, P. 80-1.

into a mental image.⁸

In their examination of the tourist gaze Crawshaw and Urry document parallel developments in both commercial travel and photography during the nineteenth century, emphasising the significance of the emerging 'desire to fix and appropriate the scene'. The activity of taking photographs still enables us to 'take possession of space in which [we] are insecure'.⁹ However in the postmodern era many of the typical objects of the tourist gaze are available in the living room. The 'post-tourist' does not have to leave his or her armchair to see the sights. He or she is thus less concerned with 'authenticity', aware that tourism is merely a series of texts or games to be performed or played. In keeping with this notion of multiple choice, 'postmodern' postcards often offer a selection of views, emphasising the range of experiences available.

2

The post-tourist has often been conceptualised as a *flâneur*, able to 'travel, arrive, gaze, move on, be anonymous in kind of liminal zone'. For Crawshaw and Urry the flâneur's interest in the 'dark corners' of the city is a form of 'counter-tourism'. This understanding of flâneurism relate to the Foucauldian concept of *heterotopia*. Heterotopias, defined as 'disturbingly inconsistent spatial configurations which undermine the alleged coherence of linguistic systems', serve to disrupt order and syntax. However for Susan Sontag it is the voyeuristic gaze which connects the flâneur and the tourist; 'the photographer is an armed version of the solitary walker reconnoitring, stalking, cruising the urban inferno, the voyeuristic stroller who discovers the city as a landscape of voluptuous dreams'.¹⁰ Jokinen and Veijola contest the construction of the post-tourist as flâneur, noting that in Benjamin's era flâneurism was practised by 'marginal people in ..marginal spaces' while in the post-modern context it is one of the 'prime-time practices in prime places'.¹¹

For some tourists the guided walking tour is preferable to idle *flanerie*. Many of these tours are themed; in Dublin the 'Musical Pub Crawl' or the Zozimus Mediaeval Tour' (which also includes encounters with ghosts) are both popular. Tourists can also hire a map and an audio tape in their chosen language and set off without a guide. Alternatively they can retrace the steps of Dublin's most famous flâneur; Leopold Bloom. One might assume that following a map would run counter to the definition of flâneurism. However in an examination of the Joyce

⁸ Sontag, Susan (1979), *On Photography*, Harmondsworth: Penguin, p. 167.

⁹ *ibid.*, p. 9-10.

¹⁰ Sontag, *op. cit.*, p. 55.

¹¹ Jokinen, Eeva and Veijola, Soile (1997) 'The Disoriented Tourist; The figuration of the Tourist in contemporary Cultural Critique' in Rojek and Urry (ed.) *Touring Cultures; Transformations of Travel and Theory*, London: Routledge, p. 25.

Industry' Stephanie Rains refers to the followers of the 'Ulysses Walk' as 'post-modern flaneurs'.¹²

Citing de Certeau, Rains emphasises that even though the route may be mapped the actual experience of walking cannot; because it incorporates memories and personal associations. These tourists, she suggests, are particularly aware of the 'unauthentic' nature of their actions because they are following in the footsteps of a fictional character. She concludes that 'in composing their own experiences of the city, even as they supposedly follow the 'authorised' maps, such walkers are also resisting the officially prescribed uses of urban space, thereby creating Foucauldian heterotopias of the city streets'.¹³

In her exploration of Dublin as 'heritage-city' Rains poses the important question; 'Whose heritage?'. Heritage tourism has been developed through literary connections, rather than through the promotion of the city as colonial power-base because 'literary Dublin' is more acceptable to the indigenous population. Georgian architecture is thus marketed to tourists as a link with a creative rather than a colonial past. Postcards of Georgian Dublin carry the following text; 'Dublin is a city steeped in history, tragic and glorious, with haunting memories of great patriots, statesmen, writers, scientists and scholars'.¹⁴

3

Rains also emphasises the relationship between proper names and memory in the location of identity by Dublin citizens; 'these names make themselves available to the diverse meanings given to them by passers-by'.¹⁵ For Rains the city's proper names 'enshrine' Dublin through the work of Joyce rather than through colonial history and in this way create a heritage 'within which Dubliners can locate themselves'.¹⁶ Although Rains stresses that Bloom's walk is the journey of a 'common man' it is likely that many Dubliners are more familiar with the monuments of the Joyce 'Industry' which punctuate the city (statues, plaques, Museums etc.) that with his writing. In fact for many Dubliners the *Rock n' Stroll*, a series of pink plaques marking locations which are significant in the city's musical history, might evoke more personal associations and memories than the *Ulysses Walk*.

Tourism and tourist appropriations of 'heritage' must be situated in relation to the increased globalization of culture. Lash and Urry have examined the relationship between cultural memory and 'global cultural flows' which include *technoscapes*, *mediascapes* and *ethnoscapes*. Ethnoscapes are

¹² Rains, Stephanie (1997) *Dyoublong?: A Study of Dublin as a Cultural Site from Colonialism to Postcolonialism*, (Unpublished B.A. Thesis), Dublin: D.C.U. p. 93.

¹³ *ibid.*

¹⁴ *Insight Ireland 'Dublin' Postcard*

¹⁵ de Certeau, Michel, cited in Rains, *ibid.*, p. 94.

¹⁶ Rains, *ibid.*, p. 95.

defined as ‘the moving landscape of tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest-workers’.¹⁷ Lash *et al* note the emergence of a form of ‘consumer citizenship’ which incorporates the right to consume other cultures and places. They dispute the notion that globalization reinforces ethnicity and nationality. They acknowledge that global cultures have ‘no collective memories, no succession of generations, no sacred landscapes’ but suggest that nationalities may also lack a coherent cultural memory.¹⁸ They suggest that, because ethnicities and nationalities are increasingly constructed through images, many of which are circulated for the purposes of tourism, national groups ‘may well consider that the history, memories and places are no longer truly their own’¹⁹.

In Dublin the steadily growing tourist industry has contributed both to an economic boom and to an increase in immigration. Unfortunately the city has also been the site of a number of racist attacks directed at asylum seekers and other refugees. If tourism can be said to appropriate and manipulate aspects of cultural memory it may be that there is some connection between the aggressive promotion of a national ‘heritage’ and the rise of racism. It seems that, in the current economic climate, questions of heritage acquire a significance which goes far beyond the preservation of landmark buildings or other cultural artifacts.

¹⁷ Lash, Scott and Urry, John (1994)*Economies of Signs and Space*, London:Sage, p. 307.

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p. 310.

¹⁹ *ibid.*

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