Reclaiming Gothic Dublin: Tourism and the Cult of Stoker

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Introduction: Stokerland

In late October 2012, a small, pop-up literary festival took place in Dublin city centre. Marking one hundred years since Bram Stoker's death, Dublin City Council (DCC), in partnership with Fáilte Ireland (the Irish tourism board), funded a number of events celebrating the Dublin-born author and his most famous work: *Dracula* (1897). The festival strategically coincided with Hallowe'en, a bank holiday weekend in Ireland derived originally from the pagan festival of *Samhain* (a Gaelic word pronounced 'sah-wen') celebrated in Ireland since pre-Christian times. The festival of *Samhain* heralds a change in seasons from autumn to winter, with *Oíche Shamhna* (pronounced 'ee-hah howna', the night of *Samhain* or Hallowe'en) believed to be the time when the barrier between the living and the dead is at its most permeable. From the outset, the Stoker festival was a conscious balance of literary, history and Gothic elements, playing on the supernatural antecedents of the pagan Hallowe'en festival while leveraging Stoker as a Dubliner and Gothic author. In a press release at the time, then Lord Mayor of Dublin, Naoise Ó Muirí, conflated history, literature and the supernatural in his opening statement:

> Bram Stoker, the three-day Halloween festival, takes young and old alike on a
> whirlwind tour of the city's gothic past, guaranteeing a spine-chilling weekend
> of adventure. Ireland has a reputation for producing some of the best
> playwrights, poets and novelists in the world and amongst this extraordinary
> list of creative writers in none other than Bram Stoker […] It is incredible that
> Bram Stoker wrote this seminal novel in Dublin and we are delighted to be
> part of a festival that aims to celebrate that fact. (2012)

As Ireland was then emerging from the global economic recession and crippling austerity, the sudden return to government-sponsored Arts funding was as surprising as it was welcome. The combination of the world's most famous vampire, Hallowe'en, and the historic streets of Dublin city proved fertile ground for the imagination and the festival was so popular that

2022 saw its tenth iteration, much expanded upon since the original event. However, despite the Lord Mayor's claim that stoker wrote *Dracula* while living in Dublin, he did not; Stoker wrote the novel in his spare time while working as Henry Irving's manager at the Lyceum in London (Senf 2010: 2; and Newman 2019: 28–29). Stoker was absolutely a Dubliner, living in the city until he was about thirty years of age (1878), he worked as a civil servant in Dublin Castle from 1866. But what, you may wonder, is Dublin's claim to *Dracula*? There is a history of *Dracula* being read as an Irish tale transposed to a Transylvanian setting, which is extremely compelling and, on the whole, it is veritably irrefutable that Stoker's Irishness influenced his writing (cf. Leatherdale 1987; Foster 1993; Valente 2002; Murray 2004; Goss 2005; Senf 2010; Skal 2014; Killeen 2014; Dubino 2015; among others). However, apart from this contextual connection, the "Irishness" of the novel, as opposed to the author, is questionable. The festival itself is titled for the author, yet it is the novel that drives its operations. The events are almost exclusively vampire-inspired, with the exception of occasional displays and discussions dedicated to Stoker's life. The artistic elements of the festival have also come to the fore in more recent years, with art installations appearing in public spaces, the city itself forming part of the exhibit through use of dramatic lighting (see Bram Stoker Festival website 'Festival Crypt' image archive). These urban installations are invariably inspired by the Gothic. Abstract and ominous, the festival of Stoker omits the inconvenient reality of his diverse literary opus, focussing exclusively on the supernatural and the macabre of *Dracula*. What interests us here is the way in which DCC and Fáilte Ireland have capitalised upon Stoker's most famous work – and on the academic labour of its interpretation as an Irish text – to expand the once-off commemoration of a Victorian author and, in the process, to market Dublin as a supernatural city with this now annual event.

The festival has evolved from a modest, vaguely literary commemoration in 2012, which featured a roundtable with author Patricia Cornwell, a display of some of Stoker's personal memorabilia, and a smattering of horror film showings, to a four-day multimedia and multi-location event that by 2018 anticipated 'more than 70,000 people to attend'. The festival was consciously designed by DCC 'to wrap around a celebration of both the supernatural and of Samhain, as well as marking the legacy of the Irish author of Dracula'. That year's festival included 'theatre, readings, illustration and animation, outdoor screenings, a fun park and podcasts' (Falvey 2018: para. 1) as well as an after dark parade and the first 'Stokerland': an immersive theme park set in the grounds of the historic St Patrick's Cathedral. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, the festival was one of the

few to survive a two-year hiatus of cultural events (with even St Patrick's Day being cancelled that year) becoming fully and successfully remote in October 2020. October 2022 saw the festival return to the streets of Dublin, marking its tenth year as one of the largest, dedicated Hallowe'en festivals in the world (Salem, Massachusetts and Derry City, Ireland also deserving of honourable mentions). Over the course of a decade, the festival has leaked onto the streets of Dublin and shifted from an assortment of bespoke events to a city-wide phenomenon: a take-over of urban space with large-scale parades, lighting of historic public buildings and, in 2022, the fully 'immersive light and sound experience' of the *Borealis* show at Dublin Castle (Bram Stoker Festival Website 2022). This paper will extrapolate the cultural and touristic antecedents that have permitted this confluence of historic, supernatural and literary elements to fruitfully coalesce in the staging of the now annual Bram Stoker Festival. Further, it will argue that Ireland's depiction as a Gothic space, which is how the country has successfully established itself as a destination for lighter dark tourism, is rooted in the colonial history of the island.

Taxonomies of Tourism

The Stoker festival is an intriguing case study in the intersection of literary tourism, lighter dark tourism, and historic city/urban tourism. While the meticulous taxonomies of tourism need not be debated here, it is necessary to situate the festival and its attendants within a broader understanding of this type of tourism in order to appreciate why the festival has been so popular, and what motivates tourists to engage with this type of activity in the first instance. In her 2016 work, McEvoy expounded the parameters of Gothic tourism, a form of tourism she considers distinct from dark tourism and general literary tourism. Dark tourism is defined as tourism connected to death, disaster or the macabre (Lennon and Foley 2000), while literary tourism is tourism inspired by books, television series or films. Gothic tourism, according to McEvoy, 'is tourism that is intimately connected with Gothic narrative, its associated tropes, discourses and conventions' (McEvoy 2016: 5). However, in their 2020 article, Light et al. take issue with the categorisation of a specifically Gothic form of tourism, arguing that Gothic tourism requires prior knowledge of Gothic conventions with a level of specialisation beyond the scope of the general public. Instead, they argue, Gothic tourism should be understood as a niche subvariant of both literary tourism and a lighter form of dark tourism that is adjacent to fright tourism, wherein tourists visit 'haunted attractions, ghost tours and Halloween experiences' (Light, Richards and Ivanova 2020: 231) with the

expectation of being tactically frightened. Light et al. refer specifically to 'Dracula tourism', claiming that it is situated 'at the intersection of lightest dark tourism and literary tourism' (232). Further, they conclude that all of the above – that is Gothic tourism, lighter dark tourism, and fright tourism – are encompassed by heritage tourism.

Heritage tourism is the act of traveling to a place to explore and engage with its culture and history. Cassia describes heritage and history as having a 'dialectical' relationship: 'I suggest that history as scholarly activity can be seen as the means of production of knowledge about the past, and heritage as celebratory activity can be seen as the means of consumption of that historical knowledge' (1999: 260). Heritage tourism, then, can be understood as visitation with the intent to consume the history of a place. Lovell describes tourists experiencing the '"heritage marvellous" or "magi heritage"' (2019: 449) when visiting historic cities, a state achieved through tourist engagement with both the historic physical infrastructure of a city and the imagined reality that is conjured up through the consumption of a city's history. Lovell presents the view that historic cities are 'inchoate canvases […] in which tourists can detect the poetic "reverberations" of the past' (450). She explains that 'The material heritage environment provides visual metaphors such as ruins, which allow tourists to displace the present and mentally reconstruct the past' (451). Furthermore, historic city tourism is helped in no small part by the literature and film industries. When used as settings for historic films or as the locus for literary characters, cities – and occasionally more obscure places – can acquire a niche eminence that anticipates a sudden and sometimes unexpected influx of tourism. Lovell has written about tourists visiting the historic city of Canterbury, linked to Chaucer's eponymous tales, as well as Oxford (linked to Philip Pullman's fantasy novels) and Edinburgh (linked to J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter*). While similarly, Larson et al. (2013) have written about how the successful *Twilight* series of books and films brought acclaim to three disparate regions –Washington state in the USA, British Columbia in Canada, and Montepulciano in Italy – all of which reacted differently to the surge in vampire tourism. Indeed, even the small coastal town of Whitby in North Yorkshire will be familiar to many as the popular destination for *Dracula* devotees. Through this initial rubric it is possible to situate the Stoker festival within a taxonomy of tourism, on a spectrum of lighter dark tourism, literary and heritage tourism, and as Light et al. suggest of *Dracula* tourism more broadly (2020: 232). The material environment of Dublin city, as an historic place, further enhances the Gothic and heritage qualities of the festival. However, the literary component on which the festival is based – that

is, *Dracula* – is not a prerequisite to engagement, while its titular focus on the author behind the novel appears to be tokenistic at best. Though based on a book, the draw of the Stoker festival appears to be pop culture iconography rather than literature or biographical history.

In recent years, tourism to Ireland based upon popular culture filming locations has increased greatly. The television adaptation of George R. R. Martin's fantasy series *Game of Thrones* has prompted an uptick in tourism to rural areas on the north coast of Ireland where much of the series was filmed between 2009 and 2019. Likewise, the filming of the recent *Star Wars* franchise that took place in parts of southwest Ireland has led to the emergence of *Star Wars*-themed tourism in the region. Heritage tourism of the first century monastic settlement on the *Sceilg Mhichíl* (Skellig Michael) islands, off the coast of County Kerry, has been replaced in recent years by those wishing to visit the film site for *The Force Awakens* (2015) and *The Last Jedi* (2017), with the UNESCO World Heritage site and its beehive huts reframed as props on a film set. As Larson et al. explain, 'The often extensive amount of interest in characters and places depicted in films and books is an opportunity for the destinations in question to develop film or literature tourism' (2013: 74). However, they also caution that 'film and literature induced tourism development suffers from problems of dealing with fiction and reality, i.e. to balance the authentic elements of the place and the elements constructed by the film and/or the book' (75). This experience of expectation versus reality has elsewhere been termed 'Paris syndrome', a condition that effects particularly Japanese tourists to Paris who possess an idealised image of the city and its iconic landmarks, only to be 'very disappointed by the reality and feel destabilized and confused by the cultural divide between France and Japan' (Frochet and Batat 2013: 32). Similarly, Killeen has written that 'a recognisable trope in cinematic tradition which associates Ireland with either quaint Celtic charm or grand Gothic guignol (or sometimes both)' (2014: 2). Well into the present day, Ireland is habitually staged as either twee or eerie, especially in film and literature as Killeen shows, but also, I argue, in tourism. Far from this expectation being managed, with a view to offsetting the faux Irishness with that of the authentic culture, the tourist industry is leaning into the twee-eerie dynamic. See, for instance, the establishment of the Leprechaun "museum" in Dublin in 2010. Officially named The National Leprechaun Museum of Ireland, despite the fact that it is privately owned, the museum is the perfect example of how the tourist industry seeks to exaggerate the framing of Ireland within such abiding cultural stereotypes.

Shandley et al. (2006) have also commented upon how the film and tourist industries practice 'myth re-making', consciously working to '[allow] the cinema to be advanced as a tool for creating and marketing tourist locations', which may not match up with the reality of a place. This may certainly be the case for tourists to *Ceann Sibéal* in West Kerry seeking to visit the film set for *The Last Jedi*, finding instead an empty field near a clifftop where Disney/Lucasfilm recreated artificially the huts of the Skelligs. The studio was evicted from the original site after filming in 2014 triggered concerns about conservation of the island's ancient structures (O'Sullivan 2016). As Larson et al. (2013) have indicated, literary/film tourism is an increasingly lucrative industry, with the locations in question – sometimes rural areas with limited domestic industry – eagerly capitalising on their new-found notoriety. Lovell points out that often, 'Intangible cultural heritage is nurtured by historic cities because it contributes extraordinary, locally distinctive elements to the cultural capital' and that destinations go as far as inventing stories, myths and legends to embellish the historic site, for example 'designing medieval parades and pageants, generating historic simulacra and reinventing old mythologies' (2019: 451). It is logical, then, that DCC and Fáilte Ireland should follow suit when looking to rejuvenate the tourist industry in the wake of the global recession. Negotiating the perception of Ireland as both a profoundly eerie space, and a place of deep history, a novel that has no overt connection to Dublin or Ireland has been repatriated. The Stoker festival has leveraged Dublin's heritage as a medieval city centre with its cathedrals, old libraries and a history of rebellions, as well as building upon Ireland's reputation as the land of saints and scholars, figuring the city as the true inspiration behind *Dracula*.

Other groups have likewise taken advantage of the international perception of Ireland and established tourist draws that trade especially upon the literary and historic aspects of the city. For example, the Dublin Literary Pub Crawl (est. 1988) is, as the name suggests, a walking tour of Dublin's pubs and their literary patrons, primarily focussed on Wilde, Joyce, Beckett, and Behan. Likewise, Dublin's historic tourism has been extant for many decades, with tourists flocking to sites such as Christ Church Cathedral and the Viking Dublinia exhibit, Dublin Castle, Kilmainham Gaol, as well as Trinity College Dublin and its famous library, the Long Room, wherein some 200,000 historic books are held, including the Book of Kells. In the university's Annual Review of 2016-17, recorded figures show that over 2 million tourists visited Trinity College campus that academic year, with almost half of those (946,000) visiting the Book of Kells, an illuminated Christian manuscript dating from the 9th

century AD (2017: 92). The entrenched perception of Dublin as a literary-historic site meant that the leap to *Dracula* via Stoker's nationality was an easy one. However, it is worth mentioning here that other locations also lay claim as inspiration for the novel. As mentioned, Whitby in Yorkshire likely has the strongest claim, second only to Transylvania, with scenes of the Count's arrival in England played out in Whitby Bay and amid the ruins of the clifftop Gothic Abbey. More analogous to Dublin is the claim made on behalf of Slains Castle in Aberdeenshire, Scotland, where Stoker was himself a tourist to Cruden Bay on several occasions, and where he set his 1902 novel, *The Mystery of the Sea*. The imposing structure of Slains is marketed as the inspiration for Castle Dracula, largely due to both castles sharing an unusual and distinctive architectural feature: an interior octagonal hall. Upon his arrival at Castle Dracula, Jonathan Harker describes it thus: 'The Count halted, putting down my bags, closed the door, and crossing the room, opened another door which led into a small octagonal room lit by a single lamp, and seemingly without a window of any sort.' (Stoker 1996: 15-16). Anywhere remotely connected to the novel, it seems, has the potential to leverage some notoriety off the back of its enduring popularity, with that leverage translating to what we might cautiously term a "*Dracula*-conomy": a niche market that creates jobs and drives industry directly from association with the novel. While a full fiscal survey would have to be conducted to establish such a claim, it is nevertheless amusing and intriguing to imagine the pecuniary power that a single book might hold.

Spooner has written that 'Gothic narratives have escaped the confines of literature and spread across disciplinary boundaries to infect all kinds of media, from fashion and advertising to the way contemporary events are constructed in mass culture' (2006: 8). Similarly to McEvoy, Spooner suggests that the Gothic is more pervasive in our everyday lives than we realise. McEvoy asserts that 'Tourism has been integral to the Gothic aesthetic from the very beginning' (2016: 4), and indeed, the earliest Gothic novels are invariably preoccupied by the tribulations of tourists. It is perhaps no surprise, then, that what draws audiences to horror novels and films also entices them to engage with Gothic or supernatural tourism. Accessing difficult or disturbing histories through a facsimile of the supernatural facilitates an oblique engagement with the past punctuated by humour and softened by artifice. While Dublin's literary and historic tourist industry is firmly embedded, in recent years ghost and graveyard tours have been steadily increasing in number and popularity, digging into the darker side of the city's history. Perhaps the most popular of these is the Gravedigger Ghost Tour (GGT, est. c.2010)[1], which runs for two hours, seven days a week,

incorporating a blend of history, fiction and fantasy as it drives tourists across the city in a ghoulishly decorated double-decker bus. This overt fusion of the seemingly incompatible fields of empirical history and esoteric fantasy prove a heady recipe for success when it comes to this type of tourism, both in Dublin and globally. The emphasis, and indeed the popularity of such tours is evidently not fixed in the historical, but in the combination of being simultaneously informed, entertained, and frightened. In their study of dark tourism experiences, Wyatt et al. used the GGT as one of their case studies when investigating the attraction to, and success of the tour. When asked about the historical accuracy of the tour, the staff explained the tour's casual affiliation with the facts:

> It is apparent that there were no concerns relating to the nature of the content and the need to be sensitive in its delivery. GGT's Manager supported this by explaining they were not creating a museum piece. Therefore, there was no obligation to be sensitive towards the history. The edutainment purpose of the tour is the reason why it was designed like a set for a horror movie. (Wyatt, Leask and Barron 2021: 441)

In her study of the same phenomena in England, McEvoy notes that 'Ghost walks are not only to be found in large cities […] and they are not only run by big companies with multiple employees', noting that it seems there is 'hardly a small town in England without its ghost walk' (2016: 107). However, neither is this phenomenon confined to the gig-economy of entrepreneurial pop-up tours by armchair historians. The Irish government, for one, is also investing significantly in this lucrative intersection of Gothic-dark-history tourism. The historic ruin of a building located atop Montpelier Hill in the Dublin Mountains, known colloquially as the Hellfire Club, and the subject of many ghost stories and legends in the region, is set to be redeveloped to include an interpretive centre following a €15 million investment by South Dublin County Council and government heritage agency Coillte, despite opposition from local residents (Kelly 2017; and Carolan 2020 and 2021). It is expected that the centre will incorporate the Neolithic history of the site, the eighteenth-century history of the former hunting lodge, the adjacent Massey estate and woods, as well as indulging in the attendant lore and ghost stories (Finn 2017). Evidently, both official and unofficial groups have taken note of the rise in demand for Gothic-supernatural-dark-history tourism, of which the Stoker festival was one of the early, and government-backed, progenitors.

Inchoate State: Figuring Dublin as a Supernatural City

Figuring Dublin as an historic and literary city is untroublesome. Dublin's medieval core is built directly upon an older Viking settlement that developed into a medieval walled city, later again remodelled as a grand Georgian capital, meaning there are multiple layers of history to explore and exploit. Coupled with this, the inordinate artistic talent that seems to emanate from Dublin and Ireland is striking, not least given the island's modest population (the 2022 Census puts Ireland's population at 5.1million, the highest it has been in over a century). Figuring Dublin as a Gothic or supernatural city, however, is more complex. It is worth querying whether all historic cities are Gothic by definition, or whether some cities are perceived as more Gothic than others. Cathedrals, castles, towers, narrow alleyways, and ruins are key tropes of the Gothic genre, but they are also common and largely quotidian features of most, if not all, major European cities. For the most part, European cities emerged from original medieval settlements – some cities, like Dublin, have even older histories – yet there are certain cities that retain a more marked Gothic quality in our collective cultural imagination. These cities are more closely associated with myths, legends, and ghost stories, perceived as somehow nearer to the past either through their material structure or their culture. As mentioned above, Dublin/Ireland's representation as twee-eerie is well-established, with some scholars arguing that this conceptualisation is centuries in the making. Morin evokes Ireland's depiction in Romantic-era literature as a longstanding source for this perception as an exceptionally Gothic or "haunted" place, 'especially those [texts] composed with an English audience in mind' (2018: 114). Killeen posits that this figuration of Ireland as a Gothic hinterland was established much further back however, subsequent to the Tudor conquests of Ireland between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, linking unequivocally colonial occupation and the construction of Ireland as a profoundly Gothic or "othered" place. Killeen argues that Ireland was consciously figured as 'a spatial and temporal anomaly', a Gothic borderland that acted as a counterpart to the enlightened and rational colonisers: the English (9). Killeen cites Jones's work on the same topic, referring to 'the construction of the Celt as a kind of counter-Enlightenment figure, and of Celtic lands as zones of the weird [that] went hand in hand with the emergence of the Gothic novel and the appearance of a modern English identity' (Killeen 2014: 10 citing Jones 2002: 18). The perception of a destination has been acknowledged in tourism studies as integral to marketing that destination (Boo, Busser and Baloglu 2009). Figured as an inchoate state for nigh on five

hundred years, Ireland's success in Gothic-supernatural-dark-history tourism is perhaps unsurprising.

However, this was not always the case. It is only relatively recently that Ireland has begun to actively capitalise and embrace their twee-eerie classification. Bigne Alcaniz, García and Blas have described the destination or tourist image as 'the overall perception of a destination, the representation in the tourist's mind of what he/she knows and feels about it' (2009: 716). If tourists see Ireland as the land of leprechauns, fairies, castles, and ghosts, then that is now precisely what awaits them when they visit. As foregrounded by the likes of Killeen, Jones, and Morin (among many others), Ireland, and Dublin, have historically been figured as an atavistic counterpoint to the enlightened and cosmopolitan modernity of other European nations. This view of Ireland was forwarded by Stoker himself in *The Snake's Pass* (1890) in which the land is both monetised and mythicised. During the mid-to-late twentieth century, Ireland, as a postcolonial state, attempted to overturn its reputation as the backwater of Europe, figuring itself instead as a growing economy with an educated workforce. The legacy of colonialism meant that Ireland had to work especially hard to distance itself from the atavistic, which was used as a means of subjugating Irish people as ungovernable peasants at the fringes of empire. It was not until Ireland had emerged into the modern era, driven in no small part by the economic boom dubbed the 'Celtic Tiger', which lasted from about 1996 until the global recession of 2008, that it emerged from the shadow of colonial chauvinism. Crucially, it was not until the post-recession era, I contend, that Ireland moved into a space of actively embracing the twee-eerie. At a time when so-called "ghost estates" and empty commercial buildings pockmarked the landscape, it was suddenly possible to reclaim Ireland as a profoundly uncanny place. Ireland needed to experience the modern before it could return to this conception of itself as ancient, mysterious, and pre-modern. Between 2009 and 2012 a noticeable number of alternative tours, museums and attractions emerged in Dublin, including the Stoker Festival (2012), The Little Museum of Dublin (2011), The Leprechaun Museum (2010), Gravedigger Ghost Tour (c.2010), Dublin Darkside Walking Tour: Mysteries, Murder and Legends (2010), and Hidden Dublin Walks and Tour (2009).[1] Figuring the emergence of these tours within international trends to establish whether this was particular to Ireland or part of a wider resurgence in interest in alternative histories is beyond the scope of this paper, though as Shandley et al. posit, tourism is 'a post-colonial enterprise mediated by literary and cultural influences – a cultural postcolonialism facilitated by globalisation and the globalising reach of the culture industry' (Shandley, Jamal

and Tanase 2006: 138). When the Stoker festival was first staged in the centenary of Stoker's death, its success was a result of a concomitant rise in dark tourism, literary/film tourism, and the pervading desire to figure Ireland as an inchoate state.

Conclusion

In an online article published just before the fifth Stoker festival held in 2016, Killeen commented upon the legacy of 'the best-known vampire of them all' (para. 3), while acknowledging that 'most who recognise [Dracula's] name will never have read the novel in which he first appeared, or even have heard of such a person as Bram Stoker' (para. 5). Despite this, Killeen points to our enduring interest in the hybrid characters that populate Gothic stories and films, suggesting that in our own ways, each of us can relate to feeling outside or 'in-between' at some stage in our lives: 'The Gothic, which is packed full of "in-between" monsters, like vampires (who are living and dead), may well be irresistible to hyphenated figures and groups (which might help explain its attraction for teenagers also)' (2016: para. 14). Killeen also suggests that Ireland has an 'in-between' status as a postcolonial nation caught between 'tradition and (post-)modernity' (para. 15). Stoker's working notes for the novel show that he did, in fact, conduct detailed research into Irish folklore while preparing to write *Dracula* (Foster 1993: 221), which means that reclaiming Dracula as a hybrid figure, representative of the race and class from which Stoker hailed, supports the effort to make the vampire part of Dublin's literary and legendary heritage. As scholars have argued for many decades now, for Irish writers the supernatural has always been a means by which to understand difficult histories, rationalise sectarian conflicts, and re-engage with pre-modern culture.

Tourism is, simply put, the commodification and consumption of cultural heritage. Lovell has suggested that 'staged authenticity in the historic environment' may, over time, become 'less serendipitous and more purposeful' (2019: 463), meaning that although some cities/places have an innate connection to the fantastic through history, lore, or literature, we may witness these connections becoming less organic and more contrived in order to compete in the growing heritage tourism sector. Indeed, in promoting the second year of the Stoker festival in 2013, the Director of Market Development for Fáilte Ireland made clear its commercial intentions, commenting that the festival is 'perfectly positioned to capitalise on the recent boom in vampire fiction and lure overseas visitors to "get their teeth" into Dublin

in new and exciting ways' (Concannon 2013). As we continue to invest more of our lives in the virtual reality of the internet, hybrid working and learning, and even the so-called 'metaverse', it seems logical that the tourism sector has responded to this change and begun to project fantasy onto material reality when designing and promoting new tourist experiences in what is now a trillion-dollar global industry.[1] The appeal of lighter dark tourism – or Gothic-supernatural tourism – for the tourism sector lies in its ability to reimagine an ordinary city/place as fantastic, as more than merely a "city break" destination. The success of the Bram Stoker Festival can be found in the seemingly universal popularity of the novel and its eponymous Count, the resurgence in cult of vampire within the last two (-ish) decades, the ancient and Gothic history of Dublin, as well as the willingness, still, to imagine Ireland and Dublin as an inchoate, magical, mythical part of Europe where one can revel in the magi-heritage experience.

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