

## **Place, Peripherality, and Play: Reflections on Film Tourism in Ireland**

As two films made or partly made in Ireland, *The Quiet Man* (dir. John Ford, 1952) and *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* (dir. J. J. Abrams, 2015) offer fruitful possibilities for considering the role of film tourism in destination place-making. Though sixty-three years apart, both can be considered “cult” films—or part of a cult franchise in the case of *The Force Awakens*—and their respective vintages allow for an element of longitudinal analysis. Both were filmed in the West of Ireland and give prominent focus to landscape. Both involve a kind of spiritual homecoming or rebirth on the part of the estranged hero, though in Sean Thornton’s (John Wayne) case he “is both native and stranger” (Gibbons, *Quiet Man and Beyond* 17), while Luke Skywalker (Mark Hamill) is more accurately a pilgrim who has “gone native.” These dimensions have added to the films’ exploitability as tourist promotion. The film locations of *The Quiet Man* continue to attract tourists through local and small-scale initiatives while the locations of *The Force Awakens* (and the more recent *The Last Jedi*) have been the focus of largescale and heavily-funded Tourism Ireland campaigns. These films contain mythic elements that both draw from and work to sustain a touristic image of Ireland as a peripheral, premodern wilderness, or what Sean Ryder calls “modernity’s ‘Other.’” In a promotional sense, these films might even be considered “beautiful travelogues” (Frazier 58), and their locations attract playful and imaginative participation by tourists, reflecting wider trends in advertising, marketing, and promotional culture.

### **A Quiet Man in Cong**

In the ideal scenario for those engaged in destination place-making, the natural qualities of a place will activate and reinforce its storied traditions and imaginative associations. On the north of Lough Corrib, the largest lake in the Republic of Ireland, close to the border between

the westerly counties of Mayo and Galway, sits the picturesque tourist town of Cong—a fine example of the happy marriage of the material and the immaterial. Cong is resplendent in natural beauty: its charming streets and cottages stand between crystal rivers and streams, surrounded by a beautiful woodland area and the ruins of a medieval abbey. Not far from the town lies Ashford Castle, a luxury hotel popular with celebrity visitors, some of whom (such as film star Pierce Brosnan and golfer Rory McIlroy) have married there. Tourists come to this part of Ireland to fish and shoot and play golf, but for those who make the trip to Cong, it is usually to visit the filming site of John Ford’s iconic film, *The Quiet Man*.

Released in 1952, *The Quiet Man* starred two of the most famous actors of Hollywood’s Golden age, John Wayne and Maureen O’Hara, and it earned John Ford his fourth Academy Award for Best Director. More importantly, for our purposes here, the film’s romantic and idealized depiction of Ireland as a serene, bucolic idyll provided a promotional blueprint that is still very much in use today. Indeed, Pettitt suggests that *The Quiet Man* quickly became “an international advert for Ireland” (64), while MacHale argues that it remains the most popular cinematic representation of the country (*Complete Guide*). In the winter of 2018, I carried out ethnographic fieldwork in Cong. My primary interest during the visit was to study the physical space of the town, to photograph its streets and buildings, and to interview townspeople and tourist workers. I was less concerned about interviewing tourists, which was just as well, because my visit coincided with a violent rainstorm that drove everyone but the locals away.

Despite the awful weather, I managed to speak with a variety of townspeople, most of whom claimed to interact with tourists on a daily basis and all of whom attested to the ongoing appeal of *The Quiet Man*.<sup>1</sup> A local tour operator even went so far as to tell me that he

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<sup>1</sup> Participant observation and on-site interviews were carried out in Cong during December 2019. Interviews were informal, conversational and secured using the snowball (chain-referral) method, and typically lasted between

had attended a community council meeting in Cong twenty years ago and that someone had said—rather stupidly in his opinion—that the film would no longer continue to attract tourists. “Well, it’s as strong now as it was then,” he insisted. Undoubtedly, Cong remains a much sought-out destination for tourists visiting the West of Ireland, but as there is only one road in and one road out, with a maximum speed limit of fifty kilometers per hour, even those who have stumbled upon the place by accident or wrong turn will still end up seeing about half of it before they leave. On a sharp bend in the road, about two hundred meters from where the town of Cong actually begins, a large green wall sign advertises “Pat Cohan’s Bar” alongside an illustrated portrait of Sean Thornton (John Wayne). Thus begins a movie-inspired trail, which is reinforced at every turn. As one arrives in the town, one’s eyes are immediately drawn to the actual Pat Cohan’s Bar—a trim, two-story building with bright white painted walls, flower baskets and window boxes, and wooden picnic benches out front. A wall plaque informs the visitor that the pub was an “original location used in the making of the John Ford Classic “The Quiet Man”.” The pub also shows daily reruns of the film, though it is not the only place to do so. While searching for the famous “*Quiet Man* bridge,” just outside the town of Oughterard, I stopped at Peacockes hotel and discovered that it too shows daily reruns.

To the left of Cohan’s Bar is Danagher’s Hotel, Bar and Bistro. (Only the keenest of fans are likely to spot that the spelling of Danagher contains a ‘g,’ common in Gaelic names, but not included in the film spelling). A wooden sign out front advertises “Mary Kate’s Kitchen” with a photograph of the characters Mary Kate Danaher (Maureen O’Hara) and her hot-headed brother, the Squire Danaher (Victor McLaglen). Mary Kate’s outstretched hand is

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fifteen and thirty minutes. Interviewees included a range of frontline tourism workers (hoteliers, gift shop employees, tour operators, local retailers), who were asked about their views and experiences of tourism in Cong and about the enduring legacy of *The Quiet Man* in particular.

cleverly positioned so as to make it look as if she is pointing to the house specials, which include creamy seafood chowder, home-made Irish stew, Connemara smoked salmon and traditional bacon and cabbage. From here the road winds downwards, and about fifty meters later one passes the Tourist Office on the right, and on the left—at the focal point of this cinematic trail—a bronze, life-sized sculpture of Sean Thornton and Mary Kate Danaher in their iconic embrace, an embrace that has been re-enacted innumerable times since by tourists visiting Cong, and which even found its way into another classic film, *E.T.*

The site of the sculpture is the most visited and most photographed part of the town, or so the locals I interviewed told me. A café owner insisted that whenever she passes it there is a tourist standing there, especially during the summer months. A local hotelier similarly commented: “Every time you drive pass there’s a fella standing there with a girl in his arms!” Surprisingly, the sculpture is relatively new, having been designed by local artist Mark Rhodes and officially unveiled in October 2013.

In their recent work, *Doing Visual Analysis*, Per Ledin and David Machin describe “social semiotics” as an approach that considers objects and signs as semiotic resources, each with its own meaning potential. Their approach takes account of such qualities as design materials, colors, textures and the use of space. Employing this approach, one might, for example, suggest that the life-sized sculpture of Sean Thornton and Mary Kate Danaher, which is entirely open to the public, invites interaction and guides this process. It invites the spectator to approach it, to touch it, to film it, to imitate it, and—for those small enough—to climb up on top of it, to swing from it and play with it. Equally, it not only communicates a sense of commemoration, but the use of bronze arguably suggests timelessness and permanence. It is noteworthy, too, that the sculpture is based on the happy ending of the film, when the outsider has been fully embraced by the local community—a fitting welcome to the foreigners who flock to see it.

The narrow road winds its way downwards until it hits the banks of Lough Corrib and then it turns sharply right, leading immediately to The Quiet Man Museum, which is housed in a small white cottage with a thatched roof (itself a replica of the film's 'White O'Morn Cottage'). An etched slab of stone outside reads: "A Quiet Place To Rest And Remember 'The Quiet Man.' Dedicated To All Those Who Made This Modern Legend For The Village Of Cong." The Quiet Man Museum and its accompanying website are worthy of a case study in their own right, but here it is worth simply highlighting how they appeal to the "participatory imagination" of tourists and lay claim to cinematic authenticity, as opposed to cultural or historical authenticity (Stones 270). Though clearly inseparable, it is the unreality of Innisfree rather than the reality of Cong that the museum and website promote—an instance of what Rob Stones might term the authenticity of inauthenticity.

Visitors to The Quiet Man Museum website are informed that everything they will encounter at the museum—from the furnishings and costumes to the four-poster bed—is an "authentic reproduction" (quietmanmuseum.com). They are invited to partake in a variety of guided tours, including a "chauffeur driven tour" (for the well-heeled, presumably), and they are advised that the gift shop "contains the largest collection of Quiet Man memorabilia for sale in the world." The website contains numerous photographs of smiling tourists, posing in front of the sculpture or in the midst of a walking tour or dressing up as the film's main characters. It also contains written testimonies from those who have visited the museum and taken the tour, such as "Roondog3931, New York," who writes, "You could imagine John Wayne in the final fight scene, the bishop visiting town to check on the strength of his congregation ('Cheer Like Good Protestants'), and the excitement caused by Hollywood's biggest star living in this idyllic town for months in 1951." The website further notes that John Wayne's family visited the museum and that his widow, Josephine, wrote in the visitor book: "Duke would have loved this!"

According to the locals I interviewed, The Quiet Man Museum remains a major draw for fans of the film. A local gift store employee told me that tourists “get really disappointed when the museum is closed. Two ladies cried when it was closed. Americans.” About halfway up a narrow lane, just past the museum, is Dying Man House—a tiny, white-painted cottage with a bright red door where, in the film, an ostensibly dying man hears news of the ongoing fight between Sean Thornton and the Squire Danaher and suddenly jumps from his death bed and runs up the street to see for himself. “Dying Man House in the Film “The Quiet Man” 1951” is etched on a white plaque to the right of the door. To the left, just by the window, a coin slot has been built into the wall. An up-facing horse shoe sits above it, with the words, “Lucky Old Horse Shoe. Make a Wish.” According to the local hotelier I interviewed, the dying man in the film was actually John Ford’s brother. “When I tell everybody that they crack up,” he said.

About two hundred meters further along, the road leads to a petrol station. Turning left, one exits the town on the road that leads to Clonbur, approximately six kilometers away; turning right, one heads down Main Street, completing the circuit and returning to the starting point: Cohan’s Bar. On the top corner of Main Street, facing the petrol station, is a souvenir shop housed in a timeworn two-story building. On one side of the building the words “The Quiet Man Café” are written in large white letters against a green background, although in point of fact, the café has been closed for years.

Cong is a beautiful little town that contains a wealth of tourism attractions, including Cong Abbey, Saint Mary of the Rosary Catholic Church, and the reputed burial site of Ireland’s last high king. However, despite these immanently interesting sites, it is *The Quiet Man* that remains the town’s primary draw. The film’s preeminence is revealed in roadside advertising, ubiquitous photographs and illustrations of the main characters, daily reruns, wall plaques, old film posters and memorabilia—and, of course, the pièce de résistance: the

bronze sculpture itself. Along with the physical design and layout of the town (notably its one-way traffic system), these material artefacts work together to channel the chiefly cinematic meanings of Cong to visitors; they shape social interactions with the town and encourage a particular kind of gazing—what Urry and Larsen refer to as the “mediatized gaze” (20). In respect of *The Quiet Man* itself, they communicate its genre, the mood it invokes, and the kind of story it tells about Ireland. In this little picturesque town, for the time being at least, ancient history plays a deeply interesting but nonetheless supporting role to the silver screen.

### **Searching for Skywalker**

Tourism Ireland, the body primarily responsible for marketing Ireland internationally, has to date been highly successful in its efforts, with Ireland currently ranked third out of 136 countries in the World Economic Forum’s 2017 Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Report (WEF). Tourism Ireland continues to rely on traditional advertising forms, such as television commercials, outdoor advertising and travel brochures, but it increasingly makes use of social media and has a presence on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, along with its own YouTube channel. In recent years, however, it has focused most heavily on attracting and capitalizing on film and television production in Ireland—a growing entertainment orientation that is further evident in the use of actor Liam Neeson to narrate specially produced short films for online viewing, such as the 2016 #GoGreen4PatricksDay campaign.

In late 2015, Tourism Ireland launched a new campaign to coincide with the release of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*. The film’s climactic denouement occurs on the remote island of Skellig Michael (known as Ahch-To), located about twelve kilometers from the

south-west coast of Kerry, and this quickly became the pivot of the entire campaign. Skellig Michael is a UNESCO world heritage center and houses a well-preserved monastic outpost dating from the sixth century that was chosen by “a small group of ascetic monks who, in their pursuit of greater union with God, withdrew from civilization to this remote and inaccessible place” (World Heritage Ireland). Many centuries later the site was “chosen” again, this time by “intrepid adventurers from a record-breaking movie franchise” who “discovered a place so wild, so beautiful and so otherworldly that they immediately gave it a starring role in one of the biggest films the world had ever seen” (“Star Wars in Ireland”).

The campaign surrounding *The Force Awakens* was rolled out across fourteen markets, including Europe, the United States, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and India, and included television commercials, a dedicated webpage, and community forum; Facebook and Twitter posts; and a variety of other promotional activities. Of particular note is a short “behind-the-scenes” film created by Lucasfilm and commissioned by Tourism Ireland, which offers viewers a limited glimpse of the production process behind *The Force Awakens* and features director J. J. Abrams and other crew members discussing why they chose Skellig Michael as a filming location. The evocative language used by Abrams and the other crew members in this two-minute film points to a blurring of material and fictional worlds in the filmmaker-tourist gaze as it lays claim to cinematic authenticity: “The standard had to be authenticity, the standard had to be reality”; “We needed to find somewhere completely from another time and place”; and “In *Star Wars* places matter, they really are related to who the characters are” (“*Star Wars: The Force Awakens* – Behind the Scenes in Ireland”). The overriding impression here is of a natural synergy between landscape and dreamscape, between the physical environment of Skellig and the filmmaker’s vision of Ahch-To—a blurring of imaginary and real worlds that is a dominant theme in studies of fan tourism (Tzanelli; Light). Indeed, this impression is given added emphasis in the “description” of the



film on YouTube, which reads: “Go behind the scenes on the set of *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* and learn why JJ Abrams chose this spectacular island in Ireland *to be part* of a galaxy far, far away...” (emphasis added). Although Skellig is a real place of historical and cultural significance, this remote, inaccessible and “sparse rocky habitation sticking out of the waters” was deemed cinematically sacred because of how it “fed into” the *Star Wars* universe (Barton 300). It was deemed an authentic representation of place, even if that place (where the anchorite Luke Skywalker has been in hiding) lives only in the filmmaker’s imagination (cf. Johnson-Yale).

In December 2017, Tourism Ireland launched a new phase of the campaign to coincide with the release of *Star Wars: The Last Jedi*. The launch included sending a billboard into space using a weather balloon, with Tourism Ireland announcing that it just launched “Planet Earth’s first interstellar tourism campaign.” The organization also shared news of the launch, as well as photographs and video, with its 20,000 international media contacts, four million plus Facebook fans, and more than 451,000 followers on Twitter around the world (*Star Wars: The Last Jedi—Exclusive Behind the Scenes in Ireland*). As before, the campaign centered on Skellig Michael, although this time it also included other destinations (such as Loop Head, the Dingle Peninsula, and Brow Head) along Ireland’s “cosmic coastline” or Wild Atlantic Way. Another behind-the-scenes film was made, this time featuring director Rian Johnson and actors Mark Hamill (Luke Skywalker) and Daisy Ridley (Rey). In this short film, Mark Hamill says that Ireland is “like a fairy-tale world. . . . You just can’t believe your eyes” (*Star Wars: The Last Jedi—Exclusive Behind the Scenes in Ireland*). In a subsequent promotional film, Hamill remarks: “To come back to Ireland was a great treat for all of us because the beauty of that country is unmatched. You get up in the morning and see vistas where I was sure it was a special effect” (*Star Wars—Exclusive Interview with Mark Hamill*).

Tourism Ireland's *Star Wars* campaigns signal a deepening relationship between the tourist and culture industries (Tzanelli), revealed also in the fact that the "grand prize" in Lucasfilm's 2016 "Force for Change" charitable initiative offered fans the chance to win a trip to Ireland, sponsored by Tourism Ireland in New York. More broadly, they signal an increasingly playful and interactive approach to destination marketing, combined with much more sophisticated tools for monitoring and tracking this interactivity. It is noteworthy, for example, that the aforementioned promotional films have been viewed more than a million times each on YouTube. The apparent willingness of viewers/fans/prospective tourists to seek out this content is interesting in itself, but so too is the documentary format, which is indicative of a more light-touch, oblique, and somewhat disguised form of promotion. Moreover, the fact that these behind-the-scenes films were commissioned by Tourism Ireland is only evident at the very end of them, when "Ireland.com" appears briefly on screen. Mara Einstein has argued that a new marketing model is emerging in which "social media, experiential marketing, stunts, and public relations take precedence over traditional, straightforward sales messages" (26). Destination marketing may be the example par excellence of the model Einstein describes.

### **Peripherality as Promotional Blueprint**

It has previously been suggested that what unites the decidedly local and small-scale efforts in Cong and its environs to capitalize on film tourism and the considerably more large-scale activities of Tourism Ireland is a shared emphasis on cinematic authenticity and fan participation. Clearly, the screen fictions in both cases differ, not least because *The Quiet Man* was set in Ireland, albeit in a fictional town, while *The Force Awakens* was set in a

purely fictional world and was merely filmed on location in Ireland (see Lundberg et al.). Equally, while the entirety of the former was set in Ireland, the latter (and the *Last Jedi*, which followed it) was only partly filmed in Ireland, although the narrative structure might lead one to reasonably conclude that Ahch-To is the most important place in the film. Leaving aside their many differences and the fact that they hail from markedly different time periods, these screen fictions share a number of mythic elements that have helped sustain an image of Ireland “as a peripheral location infused with Celtic spirituality and other premodern attributes” (Barton 304).

Numerous critics have analyzed *The Quiet Man*, none more so than Luke Gibbons, who reads it through the lens of “soft primitivism.” For some, the film is a mawkish, offensive embarrassment, the epitome of paddywhackery. Kevin Myers, for example, describes it “as utterly gruesome a misrepresentation of any country that I know of.” In contrast, Martin McLoone describes it as a “subversive comedy” (58). Gibbons not only shares this view but is scathing of simplistic readings of the film: “If there is anything more stereotypical than the characters in *The Quiet Man*, it is the responses of critics who take the film entirely at face value and see in it only the surface simplicity that Sean Thornton himself mistakes for the real Ireland” (*Quiet Man and Beyond* 18). Leaving aside the question of critical reception, it is undoubtedly the case, as Séan Crosson notes, that *The Quiet Man* “set a template for Ireland’s promotion of itself for over half a century.” (1). The film directly inspired the then-fledgling Irish tourism board to produce similar visions of the country, such as “Ireland in Spring,” a promotional film produced five years after *The Quiet Man* was released. The film, which is just under twenty-six minutes long and available to view on The Irish Film Institute’s Irish Film Archive (IFI 1957), centers on cultural festivals and pageants of the era and showcases traditional music, fly fishing, Gaelic sports and other activities.

James P. Byrne suggests *The Quiet Man* conforms with the classical Western plot of the estranged hero who comes to the rescue of the besieged community—a point of obvious similarity with *The Force Awakens*, as is the fact that the hero in both cases is a white American male. More important, however, is the contrast both films establish between tradition and modernity, and how “remoteness” is aligned with the former (Greiner). If the Ireland of Innisfree is a place where “modernity hasn’t fully arrived” (Ryder 53), the Ireland of Ahch-To is a place modernity has bypassed altogether. There is a conspicuous absence of modern technology in both settings; instead, the inhabitants (or sole inhabitant, in the case of Luke Skywalker) appear to be living in harmony with nature. Indeed, it is noteworthy that technology arrives with the visitor in both cases, even if the technologies in question are light years apart: Thornton arrives by train, Skywalker in an X-wing starfighter.

It was suggested above that the “behind-the-scenes” films made for *Star Wars* reinforce an image of Ireland as a remote, peripheral place. Ahch-To is a watery green planet of rocky archipelagos, located in the “Unknown Regions.” In a similar way, John Hill argues that John Ford’s vision of Ireland when making *The Quiet Man* was “less situated in the past than in the imaginary. . . . [Sean Thornton’s] destination has no real geographical location; rather, it is an Ireland of the mind, out of time and unchanging” (185). Hill further suggests that it is a context “primarily associated with the land and nature, the rural rather than the urban, the agricultural rather than the industrial,” and that it is “infused with a religious consciousness” (194-5). The fact that Luke Skywalker’s choice of refuge happens to be a sixth-century monastic settlement in “real life” is no coincidence. Ireland has long been seen as a place for spiritual rebirth and redemption for the modern individual (Ryder). Indeed, Hill’s suggestion that Sean Thornton’s return to Ireland in *The Quiet Man* “may be characterized as a desire to return to the womb” (188-9) parallels Luke Skywalker’s desire to find the birthplace of the Jedi Order.

None of this is to suggest that *The Quiet Man* and recent *Star Wars* films construct Ireland in identical ways or that touristic representations of the country have remained unchanged since the release of the former in 1952. Rather, to borrow from Rod Stoneman, these particular screen fictions and the destination place-making activities around them can be seen as parts of complex, interacting, and circular image systems that are international in scope and reach (254). Equally, it is worth remembering that different sites of film tourism, even those in close proximity (as is the case here), are to some extent in competition for tourists. For example, a local tour operator in Cong became somewhat defensive and exasperated when I mentioned *Star Wars*: “Ireland is about the people, it’s not about *Star Wars*. That’s a bit of it, right, but it’s about the people . . . and that’s what everyone says! When I talk to Americans and ask them what they most love about Ireland, they say it’s the people. They never mention *Star Wars*. I can guarantee you that. They never mention *Star Wars*!”

### **Concluding Thoughts: Tourism and Playful Promotional Culture**

Just as with any other tourist destination, visitors to Ireland come for a wide variety of reasons, including culture, landscape, food and music. However, it is the country’s reputation “as an enchanting land where legend and reality mingle” (Middleton)—or what Negra describes as a “pre-industrial theme park”—that remains its primary appeal. This enduring place-myth helps to explain why continental Europeans continue to describe Ireland as “a saved country and culture undisturbed by European history—a mythical island—a real authentic destination that could offer escapism and freedom” (Fanning 253). It was suggested above that film tourism is playing an increasingly important role in perpetuating this place-

myth and that fans have become an important target audience. Equally, it was highlighted that Tourism Ireland is increasingly keen to both capture and encourage the posting and sharing of photos, videos, and commentaries by visiting fans and tourists—what West and McAllister call “digital promotional texts” (7). However, it is worth pointing out that these play an equally important promotional role for the tiny town of Cong, where visitors appear just as keen to record their experiences, especially when performing in front of the now-famous bronze sculpture.

As numerous recent studies of tourism suggest, fandom has become an integral part of the industry worldwide. Fandom entails deeply affective, devotional, and imaginative relationships. A fan is not a passive visitor; by definition, he or she is passionate, engaged and committed—a person who feels a distinctly *participatory* urge. The fact that the screen fictions discussed here are “cult films” is clearly important. *Star Wars* has accumulated legions of fans over the years, but the *Quiet Man* also has its own “Quiet Maniacs.” MacHale, who coined this term, describes these devotees in the following way: “In my experience, they tend by and large to be menopausal males of Irish-American or Irish ancestry, many of whom have developed hot flushes for Maureen O’Hara. Wives and younger family members are in turn affected with the bug through endless viewings on television and location trips to Cong, Lettergesh and Ballyglunin” (*Quiet Man and Beyond* 240). MacHale’s humorous description points to the importance of *intergenerationality* in both fandom and tourism—a point raised by the tourist workers with whom I spoke. For example, while she acknowledged that original fans of *The Quiet Man* are “dying off” or in some cases have become too old to travel, the director of an activity center just outside Cong insisted that the film and its filming locations have retained a deeply personal, intergenerational importance: “People who were reared on it [*The Quiet Man*] will come here and go, oh I remember that film. . . . I’m really happy I saw it, wait till I tell my dad that this was where I was.” Likewise, a gift store

employee in Cong maintained that while people in their twenties and thirties might not necessarily have the same “connection” to or understanding of the film, many “grew up watching it with their parents, and it brings back memories.” A cursory glance at the thousands of photos, videos, and comments about Cong on Instagram supports this suggestion, as do the names of some hashtag pages, such as #parentdaughtertime and #familytrip, which again underscore the significant intergenerational element in film tourism.

Above, it was suggested that, from a purely promotional standpoint, what unites the decidedly local and small-scale efforts in Cong and its environs to capitalize on film tourism and the considerably more largescale activities of Tourism Ireland is a shared emphasis on cinematic authenticity and fan participation. However, as ground-breaking (and award-winning) as Tourism Ireland’s *Star Wars* campaigns have been, they have not quite matched the all-encompassing promotional inventiveness of its ongoing campaign based around *Game of Thrones*. This, a senior Tourism Ireland official told me, is because of the longevity and legacy a serialized television show affords: “A film comes and you’ve got one year, one bite at it. A TV series . . . we are now going into our sixth year of a relationship [on *Game of Thrones*], so it’s unique, you know.” This senior Tourism Ireland official, who was directly involved in both the *Star Wars* and *Game of Thrones* campaigns, also stressed the importance of the “findability” of filming locations for fan tourists: “The difficulty with *Star Wars* though is there isn’t the tangible, on-the-ground experience, other than Skellig, and it’s hard to get to. So, you don’t have the same richness of experience that says you have to come to Ireland. For a fan, it’s very hard to pin down where *Star Wars* was shot. Skellig at least is iconic, so that’s a great calling card.”

For its *Game of Thrones* campaign, Tourism Ireland initially produced a series of visuals with clever tie-in copy to the television show, such as one that used the line: “A Holiday That Won’t Cost You An Arm And A Head.” In addition to location-specific promotions, stunts,

pranks, and games quickly became central to the campaign. An online quiz was developed, which challenged fans to identify actual filming locations; at the Departures lounge at Belfast City Airport, an assortment of swords were displayed beneath a sign which read, “No Sharp Objects”; the OX restaurant in Belfast displayed a series of knives, supposedly made of “Valyrian steel”; the now famous “doors of thrones” were created (ten crafted doors, each depicting an episode from the series); a limited collection of stamps based on the show was released; and “Targaryen” dragon eggs were put on sale at Belfast’s Saint George’s Market. In each of these cases, the international media took notice. For example, considerable media attention was given to a stunt involving William Mark Fisher’s famous painting, *Landscape with Sheep*, which was recreated by an art restorer to include two mythical characters from *Game of Thrones* (a giant and a dragon) and was displayed for a time alongside the original in the Ulster Museum.

It is suggested here that this increasingly playful approach to destination marketing be interpreted in terms of a broader shift in promotional culture that emphasizes entertainment and engagement and eschews obtrusive marketing tactics. This wider shift can be understood as a response to marketing fatigue and ad evasion on the part of consumers and a feeling within promotional industries that straightforward sales messages are decreasingly effective. Mara Einstein argues that we have entered an era of “obscured persuasion,” in which sales messages are increasingly camouflaged in “affect-producing content” (4). The new priorities are engagement, relationship building, and “social listening”: “Instead of telling us to buy, Buy, BUY, marketers ‘engage’ with us so that we will share, Share, SHARE. It is the ultimate subtle sell” (20). Michael Serazio similarly suggests that there has been a paradigm shift from “push” to “pull” tactics, and that new-style marketing entails “self-effacing persuasive intent” and orchestrates “discovery” on the part of consumers (30). Such tactics are evidenced in emerging forms of destination marketing and place-making; however, they



are not always accompanied by new place-myths. Despite the multiplatform storytelling driving Tourism Ireland's recent *Star Wars* campaigns, these have arguably been successful in large part because of how they draw from and feed very old ideas of Ireland as a peripheral, untamed, twilight place where native ways and supernatural forces still exert a powerful grip. In other words, while they have undoubtedly added new and distinctive layers to Ireland's appeal as a tourist destination, they have not been deleterious of long-held touristic perceptions of the country. On the contrary, they have arguably deepened Ireland's association with the mythic, the otherworldly, and the supernatural, and strengthened its reputation as a place of spiritual recuperation and regeneration. Luke Skywalker's ascetic garb and reclusive existence on a rocky outpost recalls the lives of the actual monks who once inhabited Skellig Michael and whose painstaking work and isolated lives once fed Ireland's reputation as the island of "saints and scholars." Moreover, Skywalker's channeling of "the force"—an elemental, timeless thing—reinforces an image of Ireland as a place that somehow exists outside of modernity. Fandom is at the center of all of this, but it is important to remember that not all fans are tourists, and not all tourists are fans. A diehard *Star Wars* fan might wish to visit the ancient home of the Jedi and might even feel the pull of the force deep within as the boat rocks on the waves and Skellig Michael slowly comes into view, or later, when carefully ascending the giant stone staircase. The crashing waves and inhospitable, jagged cliffs help preserve the myth of Ireland as a premodern, twilight place at the edge of the world, but the allure of this tiny island—like that of the larger one next to it—is not felt by "Star Warriors" and "Quiet Maniacs" alone. Their effect is usually just as strong on the visitor who has never even heard of Innisfree or Ahch-To and who couldn't tell Sean Thornton from Luke Skywalker.

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