

In *A book of migrations* she manages to avoid the limits and strictures of academic writing and the dryness of intellectual dissection, to write creatively but no less critically on the questions that trouble life and theory.

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Journeys in Ireland: literary travellers, rural landscapes, cultural relations.
By Martin Ryle. Aldershot: Ashgate. 1999. 190 pp. £39.50 cloth. ISBN 1 85928 200 8

Lying at the heart of this examination of representations of Ireland by travel writers over the past couple of centuries is the fundamental geographical reality of the historical interconnectedness of the islands of Britain and Ireland. Nationalist readings of the past century have often rejected this reality, opting instead for what has been called an 'insularity of explanation' which fails to look beyond Ireland. Within the British Isles (con)text, most of the representations of the western isle in this book are coloured by contrasts in demography and landscape. Ireland is not a great deal smaller than England, yet it contains less than one-tenth of the population. Before the nineteenth century, the respective populations were not so different, but then the demographic and economic experience of the two islands diverged sharply – with the emergence of an industrialized and crowded eastern island and a rural, peripheral, 'unspoilt' western isle. This basic reality underlies the processes of tourism and travel examined in this book.

Ryle's narrative runs as follows. Most of the commentaries for 200 years have been based on well-trodden writer/artist/tourist trails into the West of Ireland especially. There was an early nineteenth-century Romantic preoccupation with the 'terrible beauty' of the wilder landscapes, with passing concerns about the exotic poverty and destitution of the people at the time. This was followed by an inevitable post-famine politicization of perspectives as commentators concentrated more on the 'Irish problem', compounded by the late nineteenth-century nationalist revivalist antipathy to tourists to Ireland. By the 1930s the modern and continuing phase in tourism in Ireland saw Irish poverty and under-development as preserver of tradition and 'other' to the 'harassed outside (English) world' of the city and industry. A recurring preoccupation in traveller commentaries on Ireland for two centuries, and by extension in tourism to any of the rural peripheries of Europe, is the tension between travel for 'knowledge' and travel for 'fun'. People and landscape are impossible to separate, and the poverty and deprivation which often faces visitors from the metropolis present commentators with a quandary. But they get over it – as outsiders they have the privilege of being able to walk away.

Throughout two centuries the spectacle of Ireland as a premodern society has been an arcadian construction of English and later Irish travel writers (and ethnographers). Ryle calls it a 'spatialization' of time which sees the rural west (as in Yeats's 'Lake isle of Inishfree' for instance) as 'an emblem of resistance' to modernity and progress. From the 1930s, he suggests that renditions of

Ireland, such as H. V. Morton's *In search of Ireland*, are based largely on a sense of loss of (a mythical?) rural England. Mortonian rurality, and many others in the same genre, are about an old England that has gone but endures even today in imagined places in books, cinema or television (*Brideshead Revisited* and *Heartbeat*) and in actuality, as it were, in Ireland.

The Irish west is a complex layering of texts, incorporating scenic sublimity, economic marginality and remoteness from the metropolis. Gaelic revivalists constructed it as a bastion of Gaelic nationalism, excoriated in Sean O Faoláin's 1941 reference to 'wildness, bawneens, poteen and traditional songs'. Others from England and the east of Ireland appropriated it as a substitute for a lost rurality. Both images were constructed by outsiders – the tourists observed by the poet Patrick Kavanagh who came to look at the peasant in his 'lyrical fields' from whose (premodern, traditional) tyranny Kavanagh, and others, such as the writer Edna O'Brien, escaped. Outsider perceptions of the west of Ireland as a timeless world of rural tranquillity continue in the popular imagination: recently an *Irish Times* report on urbanites moving to the west of Ireland quoted one Dubliner: 'there's something about the Shannon – when you cross that river you leave Europe. There's a softness, a gentleness, a civilization here.'

Ryle's invocation of former prime minister de Valera's much-quoted 1943 address, which in many ways is emblematic of a rural Ireland that never was, serves to highlight some of the contradictions in English conceptions of rurality in Ireland, and the address may contain the seeds of the ultimate destruction of the rural landscape so prized by travellers and tourists. De Valera envisioned a 'countryside bright with cosy homesteads'. The Land Acts of approximately a century ago, which gave legal ownership to the occupying tenant farmers, mean that the Irish rural landscape today is owned outright by in excess of 150 000 individuals. Trends in future planning seem determined to exceed the rural settlement densities aspired to by de Valera, with unpredictable consequences for the countryside and its writers and visitors in the future.

Ryle's book is a wide-ranging review of the literature of English and some Irish travellers and tourists in Ireland. It is at times complex in construction, but always interesting, and demonstrates a keen sense of the literature on representation of Irish place and identity. Ryle himself has many deeply felt personal asides on cycling trips throughout the 'warm, wild and wonderful' west of Ireland (to quote the tourist brochure), so that his readings are solidly grounded in experience of landscapes and people.

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Cultural geography. By M. Crang. London: Routledge. 1998. viii + 215 pp. £10.99 paper. ISBN 0 415 14083 8.

The rapid development of cultural geography, and its evolution from charisma to institution-building, is marked by Mike Crang's new undergraduate text in the Routledge Contemporary Human Geography series. While this is the third British exposition on the new cultural geography, its first American counterpart,