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Lieux d'imagination and historical fiction: The lure and blur of the real in media tourism

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ABSTRACT

This article employs autoethnography and the lieux d'imagination framework to critique the experience of walking a Media Tourism trail based on a historical novel, expanding beyond the usual focus on purely fictional works. The historical fiction of *The Gallows Pole* blurs with complementary West Yorkshire landscapes, physical markers and heritage to produce a historically-informed place of imagination. This distinctive variant of lieux d'imagination is characterised by a sense of rootedness and connection to the past, grounded in the belief that the narrative, or something similar, occurred. This belief shapes a meaningful imaginative experience, offering the lure of the real. A conceptual framework identifies elements of both historically-informed and fiction-based media that inform and distinguish corresponding tourist experiences.

Introduction

Imagination plays a crucial role in Media Tourism, allowing narratives to overlay physical locations, transforming them into lieux d'imagination – places of imagination (Reijnders, 2010, 2016). This article examines the interplay between the experiential dimensions of navigating a self-guided Media Tourism trail, the physical landscapes traversed, and the transformative impact of cultural elements that come together as a place of imagination. In doing so, we question the significance of reality-status in lieux d'imagination. Reality status refers to the degree to which a location, narrative or experience are perceived as representing real-world occurrences and history. We identify and consider notable differences between Media Tourism based on entirely fictional, often fantastical, works and those based on historical events – these inspire a distinct experience. For they invite us to believe that they might be true; this is part of their appeal – the lure and blur of the real (Shields, 2010). This belief makes for a meaningful experience; historical narrative underpins identity (Southgate, 2009) and belief in the historical *truth* of a site can lead to an increased connection to the past (Halbwachs, 1992; Poria et al., 2003). We identify a distinct form of Media Tourism; one which is shaped by the historical characteristics of the media in question. Here lies the main contribution of the article.

The term Media Tourism was introduced by Reijnders (2010, 2011) for tourism associated with various forms of consumable media and their intersections. It encompasses literature, film, television, video games and associated tours and trails. Visitors to the UK spent an estimated £892.6 million on screen-related tourism alone in 2019, with almost a third of potential holidaymakers to Britain keen to visit film or TV locations (British Film Commission, 2023). There are also examples of significant increases in Media Tourism internationally (Beeton, 2016; Wright et al., 2023). Beyond its significance to the visitor economy, it is noteworthy for its association with lieux d'imagination – a theoretical approach that allows one to consider imaginary aspects of the Media Tourist experience (Reijnders,

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2011). Reijnders (2011, p. 14) defines imagination as 'a mental conception of an object, person or event that at a certain time and in a certain place is not actually present'. He refers to the power of imagination to create alternative realities and how these imagined worlds influence our understanding of the social world. To understand imagination, we must first understand memory.

There is a close relationship between imagination and memory. When recalling an event, memory, which involves the encoding, storage, and retrieval of information, is reconstructed each time by integrating various elements. Pre-existing cognitive frameworks, or schemata, facilitate this process. Schemata enable the integration of experience, knowledge and familiar patterns into new cognitive constructs. Although this process can result in inaccurate memories, it also allows imagination; the same cognitive mechanisms used to recall past experiences are employed to imagine scenarios. This overlap suggests that episodic memory is a foundation for constructing and imagining possible events by recombining elements of past experiences (Schacter & Addis, 2007). Schemata are used in this process; they help create realistic and coherent scenarios and detailed mental images. Schemata include socio-cultural aspects; imagination is socially constructed and will change over time. While episodic memory is largely autobiographical, it often extends into the social and cultural through collective memory and cultural transmission of past events (Halbwachs, 1992). In essence, memories and schemata provide the raw materials for imaginary constructions, while other cognitive, emotional, and social-cultural factors help shape it. Furthermore, when we read a narrative, we create a version of that story based on our experiences – a dreamlike enactment; our 'own version' (Oatley, 2011, p.18). These imaginary constructions are internal and are likely to reflect and impact who we are: our identity.

This article first examines literature related to lieux d'imagination. It then considers literature addressing issues of reality-status, focusing on the distinctions and blurring between history and historical fiction, as well as between fictional and non-fictional media/literature. This leads into ontology and epistemology. The tourist trail at the centre of this research is then contextualised through the introduction of *The Gallows Pole* – a fictionalised account of historical events involving 18th-century coiners (i.e. counterfeiters of currency) that led to the creation of the trail. The methods section explains our use of autoethnography. We then present the experience and analysis of walking the trail, accompanied by photographs, before drawing conclusions, conceptualising this variant of Media Tourism, and pointing to future research.

Lieux d'imagination

Narrative involvement can influence the desire to visit associated locations (Nieto-Ferrando et al., 2024). Through lieux d'imagination, Reijnders (2010, 2011, 2016) suggests a relationship between the tourist experience in a physical place and the recollection of beloved narratives, often communicated through different forms of (interlinked) media. The concept was adapted from Pierre Nora's lieux de memoire – sites of memorialisation 'where a sense of historical continuity persists' (Nora, 1989, p. 7); however, the focus is on imagination. This is because reading a novel or watching a film can allow a connection to characters or places, and even a fleeting feeling of transportation; when the Media Tourist later makes their journey, this trip represents a corporeal realisation of the earlier imaginary journey. Speakman and Diaz Garay (2022) offer an example when they consider San Gabriel, Mexico, which was Rulfo's inspiration for Comala (a fictional town populated by ghosts) in the novel Pedro Páramo. Media Tourists visit San Gabriel to immerse themselves in Comala. Such activities reflect a romantic aspect of modern-day tourism (Urry & Larsen, 2011), one which relies on the ability to create an illusioned environment.

The concept of lieux d'imagination suggests that material reference points such as landscapes and buildings function as symbolic references to an imaginary world. They provide the building blocks for the imagination to be stimulated and re-enactments of events to take shape. Limited research has been conducted on lieux d'imagination beyond Reijnders (2010), who applied the concept in an ethnographic piece on TV detective tours. However, Milazzo and Santos (2022) studied how fans of the Harry Potter film series transformed everyday sites such as King's Cross Station in London into places of the imagination. An everyday rail platform became a constructed tourism attraction known as Platform 9¾ where fans re-enacted scenes from the films. They argue that lieux d'imagination are socially constructed and narrative-driven places that can exist as physical locations.

Lieux d'imagination potentially relates to fictional and actual places (Reijnders, 2010, p. 40). An obvious difference between the case in this article and other work on lieux d'imagination (Milazzo & Santos, 2022; Reijnders, 2010, 2011, 2016; Speakman & Diaz Garay, 2022) is that the subject and location are historically based and less abstract. Entirely fictional subject matter has dominated the academic study of Media Tourism - 'Literary, film-induced, or Media Tourism tends to focus on visits to material places associated with fictional worlds and their creators' (Lovell, 2023, p.1). There is a gap in the literature; Reijnders (2016, p.687) acknowledges this and observes that reality-status of stories and place is a question facing academics considering Media Tourism.

Historical fiction and its reality-status

The 'lure and blur of the real' (Shields, 2010, p.5)

When considering Media Tourism attention needs to be paid to the nature of the media as well as the tourism; it is fundamental to the formation of a place of imagination. The focus here is on reality-status; Southgate (2009) argues that the boundaries that separate history/non-fiction with fictional literature are increasingly in a state of flux and subject to blurring. History and historical fiction have much in common, both seek out subjects from the past, but the latter is much more likely to use imagination to illuminate these subjects (De Groot, 2010). Traditionally, historians have defined their subject by its distinction from fiction, but that assumption has been challenged; both lack absolute certainty, rely on narrative and can be considered a form of storytelling. Even if history claims more objectivity, 'The observer always brings subjectivity' (Rough, 2007, p.69).

Meanwhile, media has diversified to include hybrid forms that sit somewhere between fact and fiction, not only historical fiction but novelised biographies, non-fiction novels and docudramas for example. Rather than a binary boundary between factual history and fictional history, there is now a borderland of great width and varied topography (Demos, 2005). Where in this margin a work may sit, depends partly on the probability that something occurred - 'Probability translates in historical terms to credibility' (Southgate, 2009; 198).

The author David Shields (2010) also considers this contemporary blurring, focussing on the interaction between fiction and non-fiction in contemporary literature and culture, arguing it facilitates meaningful and appealing experiences. He points to a cultural movement in which fiction is made more appealing by increasingly incorporating non-fiction. He goes further by observing that we live in a manufactured and artificial world and yearn for the real or semblances of it: a reality hunger. Many readers want 'the real world, with all its hard edges, but the real world fully imagined and fully written, not merely reported' (Shields, 2010, p.69).

Reality-status and belief

Unlike fiction, works based around non-fiction or history invite readers to believe that this story once was or might have been. In this sense, they are more nuanced, as they seek to give meaning to something that once had meaning for real.

> Contrary to fiction, which asks the reader only to imagine, non-fiction requires its readers to behave more deeply: to imagine but also to believe. By asking its audience to believe, non-fiction invites readers to challenge themselves: Deciding whether to believe is deciding whether to change something internal. Fiction does not require its readers to believe; in fact, it offers its readers the great freedom of experience without belief – something real life cannot do.
> So fiction gives us a rhetorical question: *What if this happened*? Non-fiction, on the other hand, gives us a statement, something more complex. *Something like this happened*
>
> (Rough, 2007, p.66)

This allowance for belief within non-fiction and historically based fiction is significant, as it encourages readers to interrogate their own assumptions about the past and engage with the lived experiences and perspectives of others. In doing so, it nurtures connection, empathy, and deeper engagement with history and the complexities of human experience. This is particularly true when a narrative adopts historical faithfulness by considering the possible motives of those in the past (De Groot, 2010). Such narratives can 'communicate through character a sense of empathy and thence historical process' (De Groot, 2010, p. 28) and serve as a valuable supplement to history. Historical fiction can offer a compelling narrative shaped to fit with our modern-day constructed narrative/identity (Southgate, 2009).

Poria et al. (2003) observe that belief in historical authenticity enhances the emotional and empathetic engagement of heritage-site visitors. Perceived personal or cultural relevance strengthens this connection, but even without it, belief in the historical reality of a site can evoke empathy through shared human experiences and the moral significance it conveys: 'It is not so much the [site] attributes themselves, but the perceptions of them that are critical' - these perceptions are shaped by historical narratives that are tied to identity (Poria et al., 2003, p. 249). Narratives of the past are often seen as a solid foundation on which identities are built. Southgate (2009, p. 17) observes: 'our own present sense of identity is somehow dependent upon our pasts' - how we interpret the past and draw meaning from it. This meaning emerges through narrative (whether historical fiction, history, or heritage) which constructs and revises our life stories. We are storytelling beings, relying on narrative to form a sense of progression and continuation in a world in which the past, and our past, can seem otherwise chaotic and meaningless.

Belief in a factually based narrative and the probability of its occurrence creates boundaries for the imagination, causally affecting how it unfolds. Compared to purely fictional narratives, historically based storytelling is more likely to be sensitive to characters, historical context, and the environment in which events took place, thereby constraining the imaginings with historical sensitivity and aiming to create a reasonably reliable source (Myers, 2021). This idea of constraining the imagination tends to preserve a fixed idea of the past rather than enabling a more liberal reinterpretation, something which is a lesser concern for the purely fictional. Constrained or 'disciplined imagination' has proven a useful tool when attempting to recreate something that once was (Rough, 2007, p.68); far from limiting creative thought, it enriches it. This process not only enhances creative production but also plays a key role in imaginative consumption (Cromwell, 2024). When leisure consumers engage with pre-determined narratives, their imaginative experiences are guided and intensified by those constraints and corresponding schemata which can be informed by media. All this suggests that a form of Media Tourism constrained by history may yet offer a rich imaginative and emotional experience with the potential to connect us to the past and, in some cases, to our own identities.

Reality status and belief: ontology and epistemology

Considering notions of reality and belief prompts reflection on ontology and epistemology. Virtualities, encompassing memory, fiction, and imagination, intertwine with the concrete and shape one's worldview (Shields, 2003). Breaking down the concept of reality, we can examine its nuances through the dualisms of existing/non-existing and ideal/actual (Bergson, 1988; Shields, 2003). Comparing the past and fiction using these dualisms, fiction falls into the ideal, representing a creation of imagination, while the past fits into the actual, as it was once part of the concrete present and has left traces upon it. Both fit into the non-existing or the possible, fiction as a possible ideal and the past as an actual possibility. In other words, fiction and the past share commonalities as they are not fully real - they are not the concrete present, yet the past remains distinct, as it was once a part of the actual. Notably history is a way in

which we seek to know the past, but it is not the past itself.

In terms of the aforementioned dualisms, historical fiction can, potentially, move us even further away from the actual of the past and closer to the ideal of fiction, while also becoming less probable and more abstract, but can still straddle all those boundaries. Historical fiction potentially incorporates elements of the past, interpreted through history, blending the actual with imaginative elements in an abstract manner. Its epistemological role is to creatively represent and interpret historical contexts, although, the border between historical fiction and history is blurred (Southgate, 2009: de Groot, 2010). Furthermore, this overlap is important because it underpins the appeal of historical fiction and allows for belief and a meaningful experience, making reality-status significant within contemporary culture and *The Gallows Pole*.

The Cragg Vale Coiners trail and the moors of *The Gallows Pole*

Self-guided tourist trails, often relying on a map of some kind, offer visitors independent exploration and potentially engaging experiences (MacLeod et al., 2009). Since the late twentieth century, such trails, a considerable proportion of which are literary, have proliferated globally, with over 1300 in England alone (Gilchrist, 2017; MacLeod & Hayes, 2013). While existing research on Media Tourism Trails focuses on writers, fictional narratives, fictional locales, and filming sites (Frost & Laing, 2015), this study focuses on a trail associated with historical events recently highlighted by a popular historical novel.

The Gallows Pole was first published in 2017 by Bluemoose Books, although the version cited in this article is a 2019 edition from a different publisher. This led to the creation of a six-mile-long circular trail in the Calder Valley of West Yorkshire, England, in 2018 – *The Cragg Vale Coiners Walk*. The route connects places featured in the book and is navigated via a pictorial map that features excerpts from the book and illustrations (Fig. 1). It is a collaboration between *The Gallows Pole* author, Benjamin Myers, and cartographer Christopher Goddard (2018) – who sells copies through his website: https://christophergoddard.net/product/the-cragg-vale-coiners-walk/. Both are local to the area as are the original publishers.

The Gallows Pole (Myers, 2019) and the 2023 BBC2 TV series adaption of the same name (a prequel of Myers' work) have, according to local businesses, led to a 'marginal' uplift in tourism to the area; there are no actual visitor numbers to quantify this, as there is no footfall counter as such (Visit Calderdale, personal communication to second author, 12/07/2023). Anecdotally however, many visitors to this area know about the Cragg Vale Coiners (Friends of Heptonstall Museum, personal communication to second author 03/08/2023).

The Gallows Pole (Myers, 2019) is based on the historical criminal events of the Cragg Vale Coiners in the 18th century and explores themes of oppression and resistance. 'King' David Hartley led rural weavers and land-workers in the illegal counterfeiting of millions of pounds worth of coins, improving their impoverished lives during the time of industrialisation. In 1770, Hartley (aged around 40 years) was executed for forgery and diminishing the coin. For more on the history of the coiners, see Hartley (2023) – a website that is run by the great great great great grandson of David Hartley.

In *The Gallows Pole*, the boggy moorland conceals the coiners' activities which resist the Industrial Revolution encroaching on the valleys below. The moors are both inhospitable to outsiders and romantically gothic - a fitting backdrop for the narrative's rebellious

Fig. 1. A photograph of part of Goddard's (2018) map of the Cragg Vale Coiner's trail. Reproduced with permission.

anti-hero who challenged traditional English patriotism. This portrayal connects to the wider perception of moorland in Britain; a wild but romantic landscape. The moorland also characterises the story, reminiscent of the Brontë sisters who lived a few miles away and were familiar with the same landscape. This perception is portrayed in various forms of media such as film (Yang & Healey, 2016). It could be considered a dominant narrative associated with this landscape, one that has the potential to shape The Tourist Gaze in particular. The Tourist Gaze (Urry & Larsen, 2011) examines how tourists visually interpret and consume the places they visit, including an emphasis on the influence of media representations. Through a romantic lens, they might look for meaning as they consume landscapes visually, often walking and taking photographs.

The landscape of West Yorkshire, whether it be moorland or post-industrial, is a landscape of Northern England. As such, it falls into a place-myth-based dualism of bleak countryside, as opposed to the tamed landscape of Southern England. This links to a long-held regional identity. A full discussion of The North is beyond this article (instead see Rob Shields, 1991). Suffice to say, it can be viewed as a place on the margin, its place-myth for many years has been defined in opposition to the place-myth of the affluent and cultured South. The North is, rightly or wrongly, associated with a strong working-class culture, bleak/wild landscapes and personal attributes including friendliness, toughness and a no-nonsense gritty attitude (Shields, 1991).

Methods

How best to approach narrative-driven lieux d'imagination (Milazzo & Santos, 2022; Reijnders, 2011)? A method that employs narrative traditions and considers that ‘we live in a story-shaped world’ (Smith & Sparkes, 2008, p.5) seems appropriate and consistent. Also, a reflective approach; Jennings (2006) argued that to better interpret the tourist experience, a reflection between the specific individual and the landscape in which the experience took place is required. The approach must be appropriate to explore Media Tourism; in considering the theoretical framework of Media Tourism, Beeton (2015, p.31) observes that internal and personal reflections need to be researched and should be ‘approached differently’, for Media Tourism experiences can be emotionally intense, as associated narratives can lend more meaning to places (Beeton, 2016). Beeton (2015) supports the use of autoethnography as one such ‘different’ approach, stressing the suitability of this self-reflexive path, and points to a synergy with the media tourist experience. It allows an intimate insight into the influences and responses that shape the overall visitor experience; turning the gaze inward is illuminating, as we can understand the wider context in which the experiences are situated (Beeton, 2015). This seems especially important when dealing with something as nuanced and internal as one's imagination and as little explored as lieux d'imagination. For these reasons, this article uses an autoethnographic approach to explore the dimensions of a specific Media Tourism experience and the narrative-driven imagined world associated with it.

Autoethnography is an illuminating method of qualitative, interpretative, non-representational, and reflexive research in which researchers/ethnographers present personal experiences to convey their experiential and autobiographical understanding of a phenomenon (Frost & Laing, 2015; O'Reilly, 2009). In other words, retrospection is employed to contemplate specific experiences and analyse the distinctive characteristics associated with a given locale or culture and associated narratives. As it is located within our own experiences, autoethnography does not employ a detached voice of authority; instead, it is reflexive and it ‘evokes rather than represents’ (O'Reilly, 2009, p.188). Following on from symbolic interactionists, the focus here is on evocative or emotional elements, as is often the case in autoethnography. Autoethnographers tend to offer thick descriptions of individual experiences and employ storytelling to make these experiences meaningful and engaging. The focus is on the reader's experience; it is a social act that aims to communicate aspects of the world in an analytical and accessible manner. Autoethnography can be considered interdisciplinary (Ellis et al., 2010) and is an increasingly commonly used form of research within the study of tourism (Goulding, 2023).

In terms of positionality, this article assumes the dual role of researcher-as-tourist (Scarles, 2010); as such the motivations of the first author who undertook the walk are discussed, thereby contextualising the analysis. Indeed, the pre-existing knowledge and expectations of *The Gallows Pole* are the rationale behind selecting this specific tourist experience; in that sense, the book and the curiosity it awoke came first. There was a desire to visit a place that existed in the imagination because of this historically based narrative. Also, both authors of this article from Northern England, see themselves as ‘Northerners’ and were interested in a Northern narrative and place with which they were previously unfamiliar; despite being familiar with these upland environments more generally. As we shall see, a sense of *Northerness* is relevant to the experience of undertaking the walk. The walk took place in early October 2022 before the release of *The Gallows Pole* TV series. It was a solo hike undertaken by the first author. The weather was fair, changeable and windy but no rain and the footpaths were quiet, but more on the experience soon, first let us consider analysis.

As is common in autoethnographies, this article embeds the author's experience/*data* collection, within a reflexive analysis that is iterative and interpretative (Ellis et al., 2010; O'Reilly, 2009). The process of autoethnography often employs tools to aid memory recall for the researcher, in this case, photographs were used (Scarles, 2010). The pictures were taken of sites that warranted a stop. These were sometimes viewpoints, places of interest marked on the map or linked to navigation e.g. signposts. These photographs formed the basis for the initial analysis which took place within days of the walk. While looking through the photographs, the first author wrote up a reflective account of the experience of the trail. This narrative naturally followed the route, marked by points of interest and the emotional response they elicited. Many of those points and the bulk of the reflection came from one prominent section of the trail which was linked to the narrative of *The Gallows Pole* (Fig. 1). It was decided to focus on this section of the trail to allow for a more in-depth reflection. It was after this point that the second author became involved in the writing. The experience was already captured but refinement of the analysis by the authors continued for some time. Much of this was concerned with presentation, to clarify the account for the reader, as well as develop linkages to relevant theory.

The photographs of this section of the trail were included in the analysis of the walk. Also, it was decided to bring in quotes from the book (shown in italics); this was to reflect the connection to the literature that was integral to the experience. All this should become

clear in the next section, which aims to communicate a rich, reflective narrative account.

The experience and analysis

Arrival and anticipation

> *Up through Bell Hole they walked, stepping over moss-clogged runnels and fallen limbs half-submerged in the woodland soil. Bell Hole was the moor's footnote, its overflow and midden pit. Its ugly sibling. Its shadow clough.*
>
> (Myers, 2019, p.32)

The enclosed woodland of Bell Hole gradually thinned as I emerged from it; my uneven ascent bringing me to the blustery plains of Erringden Moor. As the moorland started to open up it appeared stretched out – an expanse where nature and the elements were showcased; the wind and an unpredictable autumnal sky were much more noticeable here without shelter. I had only seen two other people on the trail so far, a couple passing the other way. There was no intrusion of the modern-day as I looked back over Bell Hole to take in the view (Fig. 2). I then turned around and continued into the boggy moorland which played such an important part in *The Gallows Pole*.

It was against the dramatic and empty backdrop of the moor that the signpost for Bell House appeared – a beacon of curiosity and harbinger of what lay ahead (Fig. 3). Its presence signalled my imminent arrival at the dwelling of 'The King', David Hartley, a man whose name was intertwined with this landscape and tales of defiance and rebellion.

As suggested by MacLeod et al. (2009), this signpost held significance in of my imaginary journey. Just as it guided my physical trajectory, it also acted as a catalyst for the interplay of thoughts and emotions, bringing a flood of reflections, both personal and literary. The sight of the signpost triggered a heightened awareness of the landscape and its connection to the events depicted in *The Gallows Pole*. Bell House and other places at the centre of the narrative were here in this place and I was about to see them up close. Up until this point, the trail, as pretty as it was, was resemblant of other woodland and moorland trails that I have walked before.

I hoped the secrets of this place would soon be revealed: '*There's secrets up top on them moors*' (Myers, 2019, p. 10). Other than a vague sense of the past leaving its mark on the present, which is not unusual in the English countryside, it had offered little in connection to the narrative that had inspired my walk. However, this was changing.

Transformation: blurring the present with an imagined past

I continued to follow the path while avoiding the most arduous patches of bog. Soon a trail of boardwalks appeared to aid in the crossing. After using these wooden planks to walk over the morass of 'The Bog' for a while, I stopped to get my bearings and read the trail map; I noted the excerpt from *The Gallows Pole* that it featured:

> *He went beyond the top dip and around the bog patch that never dried, a place where he had seen half a dozen sheep die over the years. It has simply taken them – their legs thrashing at the heavy sky and their bleats turning into death wails as the soil swallowed them up… To most the bog looked like any other patch of moor but David Hartley and those who lived close by knew it was deadly.*
>
> (Myers, 2019 p.101)

Upon reading this familiar description, the landscape transformed as I connected it to *The Gallows Pole*. There was no physical change but a shaping of the landscape through imagination, I was now in the land that I had been reading about. I know what the moors

Fig. 2. Looking Back over Bell Hole from the moor.

Fig. 3. The Bell House signpost.

of West Yorkshire look like and must have imagined them this way while reading the text for the first time. It also struck me that what I was gazing upon were physical markers that had been there for many years, nothing constructed purely for tourism purposes. They were all there and *real* - the moors, the bog to one side of me and Bell House waiting for me in the background. This combination created vivid images of the scenes from the narrative; I found myself thinking how characters from *The Gallows Pole* would move and interact in the place before me. I pictured David Hartley '*dark hair, dark eyes and dark jaw*' (Myers, 2019, p.18) traversing the moors as I did; I imagined his enemies trying to navigate this environment and catch the coiners; I even remembered the start of the book where a boy and his dog follow this route with some trepidation. I felt like I was recalling the atmospheric story, but upon reading around the topic (Schacter & Addis, 2007) I now realise that memories are constructed rather than recalled – a similar process to imagining and one that informs it. Memories of that narrative were informing the cognitive construction of a dream-like place of imagination (Oatley, 2011). A British moorland on a crisp autumn day transcended into the extraordinary as I walked through the atmospheric landscape and the imaginary world of past events simultaneously; guided, perhaps governed, by both the map and the narrative of Benjamin Myers. The past I imagined blurred with the concrete present.

The physical markers were pivotal in the imaginary transformation of this landscape; they triggered memories of the narrative but also offered something I believed to be real and seemed to commemorate the past. Indeed, societies memorialise the past through physical and socio-cultural constructs, including historical fiction (Halbwachs, 1992; Nora, 1989). In this case, the interplay of narrative and the physical experience of this place constitute an iterative memorialisation with a distinct biographic element. Reijnders (2010) suggests that some locations can serve equally well as a setting for memorialising something that never took place - purely fictional events. However, being stood on the Yorkshire moors in the presence of the place where 'King' David Hartley walked and lived, reassured my faith that the story I read was real, it certainly felt it. It also validated and grounded this imaginary transformation of place, one which operated within the parameters of what once was or might have been; imagination, yes, but a disciplined form of it (Rough, 2007). While the valleys below may have changed, this moorland would be physically much the same for Hartley; it felt like a refuge against the changes brought by time.

Identifying with a Northern narrative of rebellion in the face of change

The historical events that underpinned *The Gallows Pole* were bound up with this landscape of Northern England. There was a

feeling of rootedness in the past but also a history specific to The North. Furthermore, the valleys below me were once home to industrialisation, which at one time was very much associated with this region.

> *So name your old Gods, lads. Honour them. Live amongst them. England is changing. The wheels of industry turn ever onwards and the trees are falling still. Last week I did chance to meet a man right down there in Cragg Vale who told me that soon this valley is to be invaded. He spoke of chimneys and buildings and waterways and told of work for those that wanted it, but work that pays a pittance and keeps you enslaved to those that make the money.*
>
> (Myers, 2019, p.41)

The above speech by David Hartley, at the Lumb Stone near Bell House, sets out a vision of industrial England that was rejected by the coiners along with the law and authority in general – '*It's time to clip coin and fuck the crown*' (Myers, 2019, p.43).

Despite their criminal and sometimes very violent ways, I could not help feeling proud and marginally connected to the defiance shown by this group of Northerners who had decided to reject the inevitable changes of industrialisation and instead forge their own future. I started to draw parallels with myself and my own worries regarding the fourth Industrial Revolution which we seem to be entering. Arguably, the industrial revolution is not over, and we face challenges, not only of new forms of industrialisation (for example artificial intelligence) and economic change but also exploitation and control. Their life was very much harder, but perhaps we share similar concerns about freedom in the face of oncoming change. The past can inform the present; I was left wondering which Gods I would choose; I still do not know. It made me realise that it is not just a question of choices, to rebel or not, for clarity of thought is needed – between what we are choosing? It struck me that Hartley had become a 'King' partly because he read the situation, saw the threats to his communities and then led, ultimately paying the price for the decision. I must keep my eyes open and read the situation facing me. At the same time, thoughts of a technologically advanced modern society contrasted against the seemingly unchanged landscape of the coiners, and the paper map I held seemed to bring the past even closer.

In short, there was a strong sense of connection to the past and to the characters depicted in the book, which we will return to later, as well as to my own identity as a Northerner. This feeling had been recently stirred by reading The Gallows Pole, a book described on its back cover as '*a rarely told alternative history of the North.*' These thoughts may be misplaced, and this association might feel more acute in this context of a literary and historic landscape than it otherwise would, nevertheless, it was there. Pride. Proud to be Northern.

This was, after all, a Northern narrative set in, and intertwined with, a Northern landscape – to me one that is both romantic and gothic. Indeed, anecdotally it has been observed that Northerners are more likely to have a romantic appreciation of their homeland compared to those from elsewhere in England, to whom it might be considered grim and on the periphery. Upon reflection, the landscape is bound up with my Northern identity, which is not easy to articulate without entering into a dualism with The South (Shields, 1991). Essentially though, it is a feeling of proud independence seasoned with a certain grittiness - as in perseverance and resilience. The portrayal of freedom-loving and rebellious Hartleys, appeared to exemplify these character traits. These characteristics will be attractive to many others who are not from Northern England; fighting for freedom against economic oppression is hardly unique to this area. Yet, it added another dimension, a rooted attachment. Some may connect to David Hartley as a rebel outlaw; for me, he was also a fellow Northerner whose character was interwoven with this landscape - a region that continues to face socio-economic challenges, this time linked to the eventual decline of the industrialisation that David Hartley once rebelled against.

Reverie interrupted: consideration of different gazes

I continued walking toward the site of The Alchemist's Hut (Fig. 4), where what appeared to be the remains of a sheepfold stood,

Fig. 4. The Alchemist's Hut site.

deep in The Bog. It seems that in *The Gallows Pole*, the site was adapted to house the highly skilled coin forger known as The Alchemist. I fleetingly remembered the description of this character at work clipping coin all day but was interrupted and the image disappeared. I heard people, making me realise that I had not seen anyone since emerging from the woodland. I moved on from my reverie.

My path was soon crossed by a young family and their dog who were walking the opposite way, we exchanged nods. They did not stop and were moving in a manner that inferred that this section of the trail was part of a regular undertaking. There was no map in sight, nor any use of a mobile device for direction, and they moved at pace; they did not appear to be savouring this place. Perhaps it was not having the same inspiring, imagination-provoking, effect that it was having upon me. This brought to mind how their experience compared to my own. Did they know about this landscape and the history that it holds? Have they read *The Gallows Pole* or gleaned knowledge from elsewhere to provide some context? Unfortunately, these questions were not answered as they passed without stopping. However, their dog functioned as a further reference point in my experience as it bounded its way through the boggy ground and was brought to a halt in one deeper section. This gave rise to a fleeting sense of concern, as the description of the sheep in The Bog with its thrashing legs and death wails (quoted earlier), transformed into the same possibility for this smaller creature.

The dog and family eventually passed through safely. It seemed that only I was concerned; descriptions of the bog made me treat it with caution – perhaps *The Gallows Pole* led me to see this place through a darker lens? I asked myself who was gazing upon the true landscape, me, or the family. The concept of The Tourist Gaze (Urry & Larsen, 2011) would suggest that the landscape I was appreciating was a product of a socially constructed way of seeing, developed through reading the narrative and using the map. The family might be appreciating the landscape differently, without thinking of the past, less romantically and with a more personal connection for example. When considering fiction, Milazzo and Santos (2022) convincingly argue that lieux d'imagination are socially constructed and narrative-driven places. My feeling on those moors was that historical and natural sites like this also hold the power to conjure the imagination, regardless of any social intermediary. The history, the physical markers and the landscape bring together the story and add meaning – a sense of connection.

Connection to figures from the past: empathy and metempsychosis

The trail continued past Bell House (Fig. 5), the former Hartley home that is still occupied and now legally protected as a Grade Two Listed property by Historic England (the listing mentions David Hartley). I thought that if it had been ruined, it might have added to the atmosphere of the place, making me even more keenly aware of my Romantic Gaze (Urry & Larsen, 2011). However, this was outweighed by a pleasing feeling of continuity. It also made me wonder what stories and secrets other older buildings around Cragg Vale might hide. This place, on the edge of the moor, was the home of The King I had come to admire. Not only that but it felt familiar from descriptions I had read (see Myers, 2019, p.65).

After taking in the scene, I considered the people that passed through this place, especially the Hartleys who lived here. David Hartley, rebel and man of the moors; once present here, now in my thoughts. I imagined him and his wife Grace, living their daily lives, as described in the book. And there, at that moment, I was walking in the footsteps of 'The King' as I moved past Bell House toward the

Fig. 5. Bell House.

Lumb Stone – a route he would surely know. There was nothing more than a couple of roaming sheep to disturb my empathetic contemplation. I approached the natural landmark (Fig. 6) – a perfect place to address the gang of coiners.

> '*The big stone that jutted from the ground like a bone and whose surface was worn smooth from years of sitting.*'
>
> (Myers, 2019 p.34)

I had been looking forward to the Lumb Stone as it features clearly in the book; I was curious. This is where David Hartley delivered the aforementioned rousing speech to the coiners, where he asked them to make their choice and name their Gods. When I reached this point, I pictured the alcohol-fuelled meeting of the coiners and a feeling that has been growing since I ventured onto the moor became more apparent still; I was feeling increasingly connected to this place and its past. I was closer to the coiners, not simply as characters but people once here, in whom I could believe. It could be argued that the Cragg Vale Coiners trail had become a journey of metempsychosis (Seaton, 2013) in which the journeys, pathways and physical landscape, which were once trodden by the coiners, are now being followed as part of an itinerary, fostering a deeper and more meaningful tourist experience; bringing to life this historical landscape and the lives of the, once real, people connected to it through one's imagination. It was certainly meaningful to me.

Heritage tourism feeds on the atmosphere of landscapes that align with specific historical periods or narratives (Urry, 1995); topography was central to my empathetic engagement that day but also to the historical novel that motivated my visit. Much like in *Wuthering Heights*, whose author, Emily Brontë, lived around ten miles away and was born less than half a century after Hartley's execution, the West Yorkshire moors shape the narrative of *The Gallows Pole* - not just as a setting but as something that represents freedom, amongst other things. These moors are an important part of the atmosphere and characterisation in both texts, as protagonists and place merge and overlap: '*David Hartley appeared of the earth, of the moors. A man of smoke and peat of heather and fire*' (Myers, 2019, p.18), much like his contemporaries, '*Men of stone and soil*' (Myers, 2019, p.29). A place and people on the margins, and of each other, which I had been able to visit. My previous visits had only been through my imagination via the writings of Benjamin Myers, but this was the first time I had accessed David Hartley's moors in person, guided by Goddard's (2018) map. I had the fleeting experience of belonging to the narrative and, like David Hartley in those pages, belonging to the moors themselves. Connected. This absorbing experience was facilitated by the narrative and enriched by its historical context; it was the most profound connection to historical figures that I can remember.

A synopsis of the experience

The moors transformed into a land of imagination, where complementary literary and physical landscapes intertwined. In this touristic reverie (Lovell, 2023), temporal barriers thinned (Seaton, 2013). The coiners felt close, animating the history but also stirring a regional identity. In *Media Tourism*, the creation of imaginary places by artists or authors, inspired by physical locations, is crucial. These places exist in both arenas and are subsequently visited by Media Tourists, blurring boundaries and completing the circle, a process facilitated by physical markers (Beeton, 2015; Reijnders, 2011). This moorland that I experienced was familiar to the author Benjamin Myers; however, it was also known to the Hartleys, and Bell House stands, with the moors little changed. This is something that fictionally based Media Tourism cannot offer, as I was connecting to these people, not just an author and their imagination. In contrast, media tourism based solely on a fictional fantasy might not be limited by the constraints of history (Lovell, 2019; Rough, 2007), but it is unable to connect to people from the past in the same way.

Fig. 6. The Lumb Stone.

Conclusion

Summary

This autoethnographic study illuminates a highly imaginative experience, shaped by a literary narrative that engages with history. As the imaginary world was constructed, memories and images tied to that narrative were recreated (Schacter & Addis, 2007). Media Tourism can offer rich imaginative experiences (Milazzo & Santos, 2022), but we argue that something else is at play on the Cragg Vale Coiners trail. This is not only an engagement with narrative and memory, but an experience deepened by a sense of rootedness. The reality-status of *The Gallows Pole* was crucial in this process. It allowed belief that this story could really have happened in this particular place, strengthening the sense of connection and meaning - seasoning the experience.

One feature of this experience was that the schema, narrative, and historical underpinning of the literature corresponded closely with historical physical markers that punctuated the landscape. This alignment made the experience feel *of* the past (Urry, 1995; Paiva, 2023) and evoked a sense of the narrative. In turn, the imaginative recreation of a historical narrative within this seemingly unchanging moorland shaped the meanings attributed to it, providing a darkly romantic lens. The transformation of the landscape engaged both physical and cognitive aspects, leading to a strong feeling of immersion in the moorland of *The Gallows Pole*. While the experience discussed here was a powerful and meaningful one, the alignment of literary and physical environments is not unique in Media Tourism studies.

The significance of reality-status in Media Tourism

How then was this experience different from other accounts of Media Tourism, which are purely fictional? They have some things in common; there is an overlap and the vehicle through which we connect to the coiners is the same that connects us to Harry Potter - imagination. Yet, reality-status sets them apart in two interconnected ways. Firstly, the nature of the imagination is more constrained, more disciplined (Rough, 2007) - confined within certain facts held to be true; something which can be linked to a more sensitive interpretation of events (Myers, 2021). Media Tourists may try to envision scenarios that fit within cultural norms of the time-period (Halbwachs, 1992).

Fig. 7. The Hartley family grave, Heptonstall, West Yorkshire.

Secondly, we can believe in the historically-informed narratives. With a level of objectivity, we can say that Cragg Vale and the moors were the setting for actual events interpreted through *The Gallows Pole*. This diverges from employing imagination to temporarily escape into an appealing fantasy that we know to be fictional and cannot believe in - at least much of the time. Simply put, one involves belief, the other does not. As discussed in the literature review, sustained belief that something may be true is what makes history powerful (Southgate, 2009); in this case it offers an empathetic connection the past and those that occupied it. David Hartley and the coiners are not simply characters in a story, they were born, led their lives, and died. We are fully aware that we are trying to connect with people who once breathed as we do. Historical narratives foster a connection to something beyond an author's imagination and picturing real-world scenarios can enhance empathy (De Groot, 2010; Oatley, 2011). Entirely fictional media, and the tourism it creates, lacks this nuance and the credibility of probability - it cannot offer such belief, even if it offers an otherwise enjoyable, powerful and liberating imaginary experience (Lovell, 2019, 2023).

Another way to consider the differences between this historically-informed experience and previous studies into Media Tourism is to revisit Bergsonian dualisms. The historical past is actual (an actual possibility) and not an ideal, or abstraction, like fantasy; neither are real, but the past once was and leaves historical traces in the present (Shields, 2003). Historical fiction/drama is distinctive because it sits somewhere between these two poles. The past makes its intrusion into the concrete present through different forms of legacy. Physical markers, like Bell House, can momentarily bring the past into the present reality, for those looking to make that connection – the/a past is recreated when we remember and imagine. Today we can walk the trail or visit David Hartley's family grave which is adorned with coins from those who remember his efforts (Fig. 7). These acts anchor the past in physical locations; historical fiction has the potential to encourage such acts and contribute to the social construction of memory (Halbwachs, 1992; Nora, 1989).

Stories can stir feelings of, and interrelate with, identity. Historical narrative is seen as a solid foundation on which identities are built (de Groot, 2010; Southgate, 2009). On one level potentially anyone could empathise with historical figures, if they can muster the faith that this interpretation of the past is credible. This however seems likely to depend on the level of awareness and interest of the individual in question (Frost & Laing, 2015). In this case, the levels of awareness and interest were high because of engagement with a narrative rooted in history and a place – one with identifiable physical markers present in that narrative. The belief that these elements are real or may have occurred enhanced the credibility of the experience, in a way not seen in other studies of Media Tourism. In this lieu d'imagination, one could sense the shadows of a past that inform our present; in our case as Northerners, which adds another layer to the experience; a sense of connection. The past informs our present and themes such as navigating social and economic upheaval persist – which Gods will *we* choose?

Historically-Informed Media Tourism

Here we propose and define the concept of *Historically-Informed Media Tourism*. It involves the experiential engagement with a narrative of the past that might be true. It includes historically based fiction as well as history and heritage; Media Tourism is shaped by the media it relies upon; our focus is on historical fiction, but history shares a similar, or at least related, reality-status.

Reality-status and belief are key to this form of Media Tourism. When a narrative aligns with a physical environment and is deemed plausible, the belief that a historical event from that narrative took place at that location is likely to follow (Urry, 1995). This belief, in turn, can increase engagement with the narrative. However, the nature of the narrative itself is important in that it must effectively communicate characters and plot. A skilled author can enhance engagement by shaping mental models of locale and characters (Oatley, 2011). If engagement occurs, the reality-status of the narrative is significant, as it can encourage a deeper, empathetic, connection with historical figures. Such connections offer more personal interactions with history and can influence identity

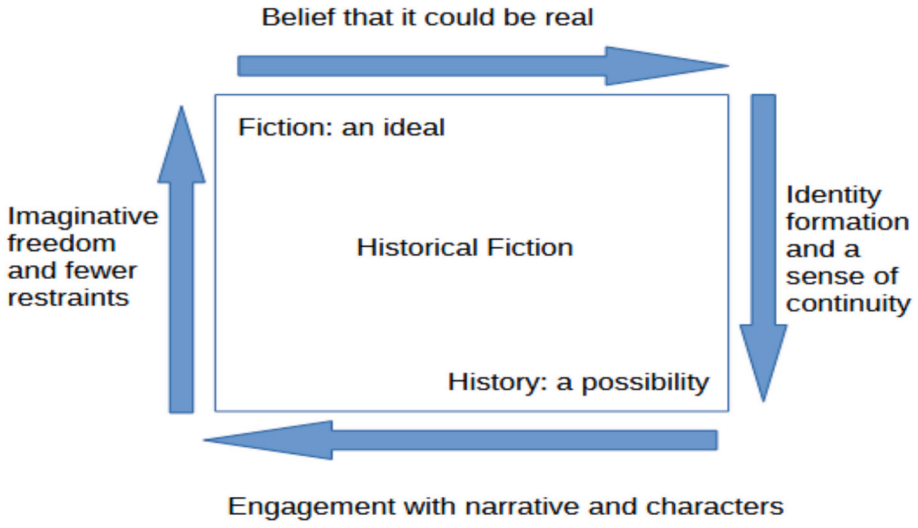

Fig. 8. The Historically-Informed Media Tourism Framework: The shaping forces of a lieu d'imagination based upon historical fiction.

formation; by linking past narratives to their own lives, visitors can better understand their place in the fabric of history (Southgate, 2009). Various intangible elements linked to reality-status, such as identity, historical schemata and, significantly, historical narrative, provide the parameters, in a sense constraints, and indeed the building blocks in the construction of an imaginary experience at a historically-informed media tourism site (Cromwell, 2024; Schacter & Addis, 2007). These elements work together to shape lieux d'Imagination.

Historical fiction can be considered as occupying a continuum between pure fiction and history. The distinction between history and fiction is blurred; both link to identity and operate within constraints, inviting readers to consider the plausibility of events, though history often does so to a greater extent (Demos, 2005; Rough, 2007; Shields, 2010). However, historical fiction, through compelling narratives and characterisation, is often engaging, fosters empathy, and is particularly effective in constructing identities, by linking past narratives to present understandings for a wide audience (De Groot, 2010; Oatley, 2011). The interplay of memory, fiction, and history shapes our worldview, with historical fiction blending the ideal and actual possibilities to offer a unique epistemological perspective and popular appeal.

Fig. 8 simplifies the fluid inter-relationships discussed and proposes a framework that reflects this continuum. The arrows represent shaping forces, namely: belief – the perception that an event could have occurred or is real; identity formation and continuity in relation to our understanding of the past; engagement with narrative and characters, which may foster empathetic connections; and, finally, imaginative freedom, allowing for fewer constraints on creativity. These forces tend to be more pronounced when the characteristics of place and narrative are perceived to align. Managing this variable, for instance by directing Media Tourists to locations where such alignment is evident, may strengthen belief and the other forces discussed. In essence, Fig. 8 shows that Historical Fiction occupies a unique position and so informs a unique lieu d'imagination that distinguishes Historically-Informed Media Tourism.

Future research

This study raises questions for the future: do other Historically-Informed Media Tourism experiences differ from this case and each other in any way? Perhaps there is a typology of such sites, visitors and media involving distinct levels of imaginative engagement and belief in the narrative presented? The identities involved in any future research are likely to differ too. In short, the forces outlined in Fig. 8 might be key variables in different Media Tourism scenarios. We acknowledge the limitations of our non-representative and subjective autoethnographic approach; subsequent studies could select/sample visitors and be broader in scope. Next steps might include ethnography and accompanied visits, encouraging Media Tourists to write reflectively or netography. These may illuminate Media Tourism as it relates to historical settings and narratives. More generally, Media Tourism needs to pay close attention to the nature and reality-status of the media in question, as it is central to the formation of lieux d'Imagination.

Finally, there are potential ethical implications to consider when exploring belief in the context of heritage or history. These concerns align with broader, long-standing debates about commodification and the misrepresentation or exploitation of the past. One cannot assume that all creative interpretations of the past clearly identify themselves as such, as *The Gallows Pole* does (see Myers, 2019, p. xii). In an era of fake news, the blending of fact and fiction in the media, and any tourism that stems from it could exacerbate a cultural issue where belief is increasingly shaped by engagement rather than evidence. Although, arguably, this is nothing new. In our view, engagement with the past can be invaluable, especially when it is accompanied by critical reflection.

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Jonathan Goodson: Writing – original draft, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **David Jarratt:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Project administration, Methodology, Investigation, Formal analysis.

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Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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