NEVER GIVE UP THE GHOST:

AN ANALYSIS OF THREE EDINBURGH GHOST

TOUR COMPANIES

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by

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# Abstract

This thesis is a discourse analysis of three Edinburgh-based ghost tour companies: Mercat Tours, Witchery Tours and City of the Dead. It explores the attitudes, values and aesthetics of these companies and their construction and presentation of self-images to their audiences. It identifies key characteristics of the tours and links them to important themes in scholarship on contemporary tourism. Firstly, the construction of an ideology of authenticity within the Mercat Tours discourse exemplifies the model of modern tourism as a "quest for authenticity" (MacCannell, Tourist). In contrast, the light-hearted performance aesthetic of Witchery Tours reflects recent scholarship on postmodern- or post-tourism, in which tourism is seen as a playful game rather than a serious quest. Lastly, the case of City of the Dead offers an insight into the role of fear as a motivating factor in visits to tourism sites.

# Acknowledgements

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# Chapter One: GHOST TOURS IN EDINBURGH

## "HISTORY, HUMOUR AND HORROR"

**"Go on the ghost tours of ... Edinburgh old town"**

**– Sweeney, The Scot's Little Instruction Book**

In Scotland's capital city, to use a local phrase, it seems as though everybody and her granny have lately become involved in the ghost tour business. The author of a recent article in The Scotsman newspaper remarks, tongue in cheek, that by the time "the average ... stroller" has walked halfway along the Royal Mile, Edinburgh's principal tourist thoroughfare, she "will have dodged five separate ghost tours, all being led by dandy highwaymen in black capes, and with white faces" ("The tourist season" 2). Another journalist likens the city's Old Town to "a spectral assault course" through which ghost tour performers dressed as "mad monks, body snatchers and skeletons dodge each other ... in pursuit of past crimes and present cash" (Clough n.p.). A third posits acerbically that:

> there isn't a resting actor in the city who at one time has not donned cowl and leper make-up ... in order to scare the bejesus out of unsuspecting ... tourists. ... [G]host tours and atrocity jaunts are touted on street corners. There is more death, decay and heritage horror to be found in Edinburgh than in Yorkshire and Whitechapel [in central London] put together. (Allan Brown 12)

My interest in ghost tours began in 1999 when I wrote a paper on the St. John's Haunted Hike for one of my first graduate courses at Memorial. I was intrigued by the

complexities of these tours as a folklore study and decided to investigate them further.[1]

As a result, this thesis explores the ghost tour as a contemporary touristic phenomenon,

reflecting on its growing popularity and its centrality to the heritage industry in

Edinburgh.[2]

During a twelve-week period in summer 2000 I spent time with several ghost tour

operators in Edinburgh and elsewhere, participating mostly on tours conducted by three

Edinburgh-based companies, Mercat Tours, Witchery Tours and City of the Dead. Over

the course of my research I was an audience member on almost thirty tours, observing the

proceedings, making audio recordings and taking photographs. Altogether I made full or

partial recordings of twenty-two tours. In addition to those of the above companies, I

also attended tours conducted by a fourth Edinburgh-based operator, Auld Reekie Tours.

For comparative purposes, I also made short visits to York, England, another centre of

ghost tour activity, and to St. Andrews and Stirling, two Scottish towns each of which is

home to one ghost tour company. In Newfoundland, I conducted intermittent field

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[1] For existing work on ghost tours in Edinburgh, see Kauppi and Mathers, both second-year undergraduate projects in Scottish Ethnology at the University of Edinburgh. David Inglis and Mary Holmes offer a more general view of "ghosts in Scottish tourism." For a fictionalised account of an Edinburgh ghost tour operator, see James Robertson's novel, The Fanatic.

[2] The term "the heritage industry" was first used by Robert Hewison in his book of that name (1987). McCrone et al., Chapter Two provides an overview of the literature on the subject; see also Fladmark (ed.), Cultural, Heritage and Search; Fowler, "Heritage" and Past; Hannabuss; Hewison, "Heritage"; Loveday; Lowenthal, Foreign and Possessed; Macdonald; Petford; Rojek and Urry (eds.); Rosie; Sorensen; Uzzell (ed.); Vergo (ed.); and Wright.

research with the St. John's Haunted Hike over a period spanning from October 1999 to

August 2001.[3]

During the summer of 2000 I also conducted a total of twenty-one tape-recorded,

semi-structured interviews, the majority of which were with the tour guides and managers

of tours I had attended. At the same time I gathered promotional materials, particularly

fliers and websites, issued by tour operators, as well as published newspaper and

magazine articles concerning ghost tours in Edinburgh and beyond. Based on this

collection of materials, this study identifies the key characteristics of Edinburgh's ghost

tours and links them to important themes in scholarship on contemporary tourism,

including the "quest for authenticity" (MacCannell, Tourist); the concept of

"postmodern-" or "post-tourism"; and the role of fear as a motivating factor in visits to

tourism sites.

The rise of the ghost tour in Edinburgh, as in cities such as York and London in

the UK and New Orleans in the USA, over the last three decades of the twentieth century

constitutes a significant trend in the contemporary heritage industry. Since the

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[3] For fieldwork conducted with Auld Reekie Tours, see Bolus, tour and interview; Damien; and Swift, tour and interview (see also http://www.auldreekietours.co.uk/). Fieldwork in York was conducted with the Original Ghost Walk of York (see McPartland, tour and interview; http://www.yorkshirenet.co.uk/yorkghostwalk/); the Ghost Trail of York (see R. Smith; http://s1.ecooem.com/gh/ghosttrailofyork. work24.co.uk/); and the Ghost Hunt of York (see Dent; http://www.ghosthunt.co.uk/). Other York-based ghost tours are the Haunted Walk of York (see flier); Mad Alice Ghost Tours (see flier); and the YorkBoat ghost boat tour (see http://www.yorkboat.co.uk/ public/index2.html/). For fieldwork conducted with the Original St. Andrews Witches Tour, see Young, tours and interview; for the Stirling Ghost Walk, see Brannigan and Goldie (see also Heritage Events Company, http://members.aol.com/HeritEvent/ ghost.htm); and for the St. John's Haunted Hike, see Jarvis, Newman and Scott, interviews (see also http://www.hauntedhike.com/).

introduction of The Original Ghost Walk of York (founded c.1973), which claims to be "an original creation" and "the first exclusive Ghost Walk in the World" (flier), many others have followed. As Newfoundland ghost tour operator Dale Jarvis writes, such tours "have sprung up all across North America and the United Kingdom, representing a sizable and growing section of the haunted attraction industry" ("Notes" 10). Cities which serve as the locations for ghost tours typically have pre-existing, highly developed touristic infrastructures and long traditions of marketing their histories to visitors. Such cities may also become the foci of more intensive ghost tour activity, with several companies competing for a share of this lucrative market. As early as 1987, for example, there were at least five different ghost tours operating in London (Newall 151n). By 2000 an equal number of companies were established in Edinburgh, each offering at least one ghost tour year-round. The city's first and largest ghost tour company, Mercat Tours, was founded in 1985, joined, later the same year, by Witchery Tours. A third company, Auld Reekie Tours, appeared in 1994, followed shortly afterwards by Robin's Tours.[4] A fifth company, City of the Dead, was established most recently in 1999.

Ghost tours can be broadly defined as guided walking tours. A guide conducts a group of audience members along a prearranged route through the downtown area of a city or town, stopping at a number of set points along the way to present supernatural and other stories, historical information and anecdotes (see Kauppi 1). The tours usually take

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[4] Robin's Tours was subsequently affiliated with Mercat and the two currently operate as one company, under joint management. Their guides undergo the same training programme and the same guides conduct tours operated under both the Mercat and Robin's Tours names.

place in the evening or at night. In Edinburgh in 2000, audience members paid between £5.00 and £8.00 to participate on such tours, which typically last between forty-five minutes and two hours. The tour party may comprise from as few as two or three audience members to as many as a hundred or more; the norm for established tour companies during the peak summer season in Edinburgh is between twenty and fifty. The guide may or may not adopt a character or persona, usually that of a historical, quasi-historical or otherworldly figure. According to whether or not such a persona is adopted, the guide's dress may range from a simple black T-shirt and jeans (e.g., Auld Reekie Tours), to a black cape worn over dark-coloured clothing (Mercat Tours), to full costume and makeup (Witchery Tours). The tours may also feature performers known as "jumper-outers" (or "jumper-ooters," in Scotticised form), whose job, as their name suggests, is to "scare" the audience by accosting the tour party unexpectedly at one or more points during the tour. Jumper-outers are invariably costumed and usually adopt personae of some description.

The majority of Edinburgh's ghost tours take place within an area of about half a square mile in the centre of the city's Old Town (see Figure 1.1). Almost all begin on the upper or western half of the Royal Mile.[5] There most of the tour companies display advertising boards which have become a distinctive feature of the area's touristic

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[5] The Royal Mile is the unofficial designation of the thoroughfare connecting Edinburgh Castle in the west and the Palace of Holyroodhouse in the east. In fact, the Mile consists of five adjoining streets: Castlehill, Lawnmarket, High Street, Canongate and Abbey Strand.

**LEGEND**

| | |
|---|---|
| ●–●–●–●–●–● | Mercat "Ghosts & Ghouls" Tour |
| ━━ ━━ ━━ | Mercat "Ghosthunter Trail" |
| ━ ━ ━ ━ | Witchery "Murder & Mystery Tour" |
| ────────── | Witchery "Ghosts & Gore Tour" |
| ●●●●●●●●●● | City of the Dead Tour |
| ● Tour start-point | ★ Tour finish-point |

To South Niddry Street Vaults, White Horse Tavern & Canongate Kirkyard

To Greyfriars Kirkyard (see Figure 4.5)
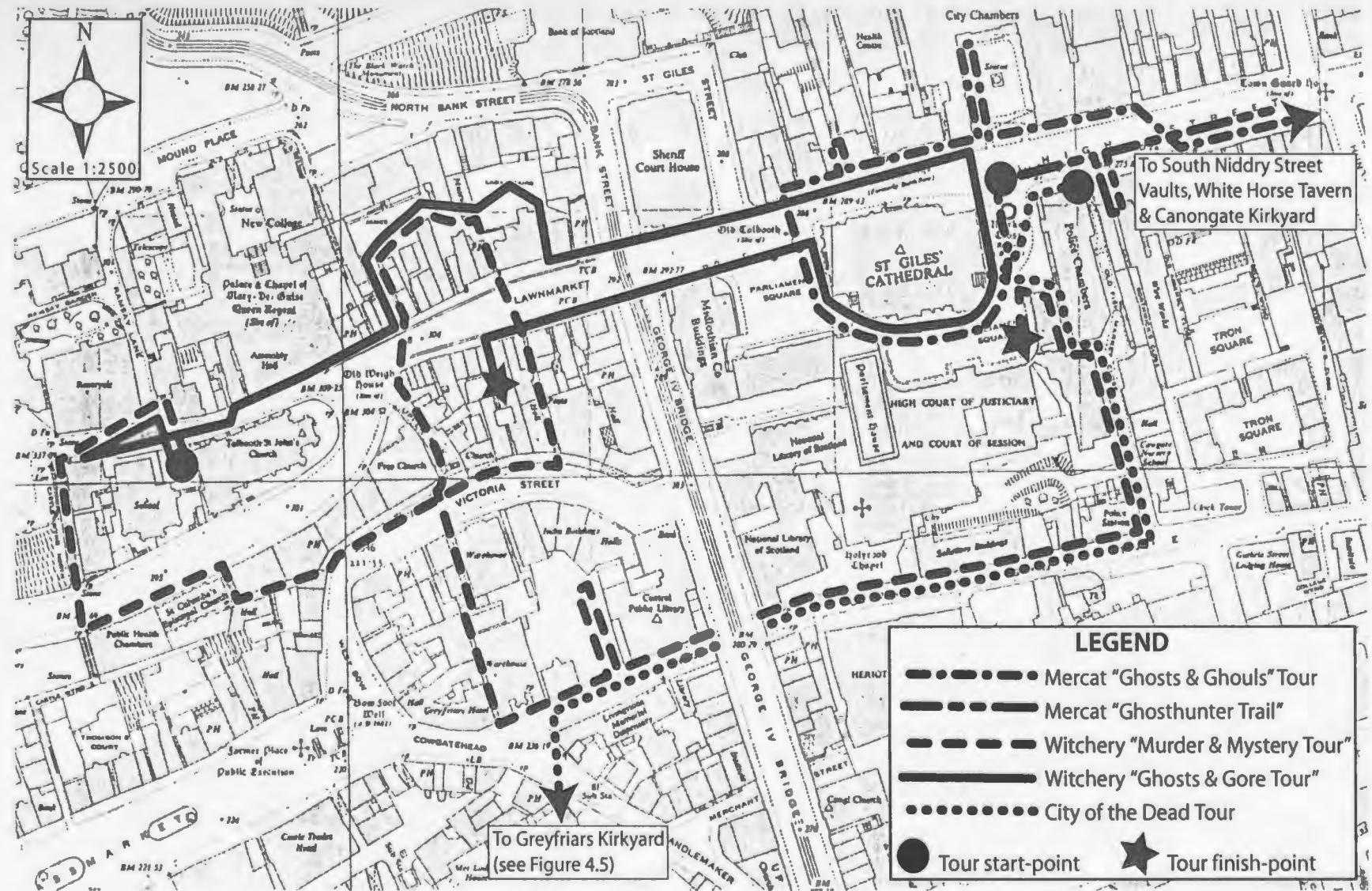
Figure 1.1. Map of upper (western) part of Royal Mile – Castlehill, Lawnmarket, High Street – and surrounding area, showing principal routes taken by Mercat Tours, Witchery Tours and City of the Dead (map source: Ordnance Survey 1:2500 NT 2573 [1950-1]).

landscape (see Figures 1.2-1.4).[6] After the first one or two stops, however, the tours

almost invariably depart the Royal Mile via one of the many alleyways or closes which

branch off down the steep sides of the volcanic ridge on which the Old Town is built (see

Figure 1.5).[7] As Witchery tour guide Cameron Pirie describes, these closes are "pretty

dark, cobbled, very narrow .... [and] a bit scary," thus representing an "excellent"

location for the ghost tour performance (interview). The latter part of most tours takes

place either in one of two local graveyards, Canongate or Greyfriars, or in a series of

"hidden and haunted" vaults and connecting passageways located under the city's South

Bridge and popularly referred to as "Edinburgh's underground city" (Wilson et al.,

Hidden; see Figure 1.6).[8] Appropriately, these latter locations exemplify the

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[6] These boards are significant material cultural artefacts, revealing a wealth of detail regarding each company's performance aesthetic. In York, where there is similarly fierce competition among the city's several ghost tour operators, the boards have become a form of ammunition in the resultant "trade war." My attention was drawn to their significance as such during one tour I attended in the city, when the guide informed his audience that they would not find advertisements for his company's tours "cluttering up" the city centre like those of other companies (McPartland, tour).

[7] The Concise Scots Dictionary defines a close in this sense as "a vennel, passageway, alley or entry back or front to a tenement" (Robinson 104). Local historian Alastair Hardie notes that "[o]riginally in Edinburgh's Old Town a close was a dividing lane between gardens but later as land became scarce ... they were filled in and built upon and the narrow lanes leading down to them from the Royal Mile were then called 'closes'" (ix). At one time there were well over a hundred such closes leading off the Royal Mile, of which 61 remain today (Hardie 7).

[8] As Mercat tour guide Kathleen Brogan states: "for years and years ... there's been this ongoing myth, ... everyone comes to Edinburgh and wants to see the underground city. And to an extent it is a myth, because they expect a whole warren, a maze of buildings underneath the city, almost like Pompeii. ... But ... that's what people come on [the tours] to see. They want to see Edinburgh, they want to hear the nastier stories, but it's the climax of the tour, is going into the vaults. And ending it in the vaults [is] very atmospheric, really adds to the tour" (interview; see also Humphreys, interview).

characteristic of ambiguity or liminality identified by Susan Stewart in her discussion of the oral narration of horror stories as "the predominant feature of the horror story's context" (40). Accordingly, the section of the tours which takes place in these locations is usually designed to be "scarier" than the earlier parts, with a greater concentration of supernatural rather than social historical narratives. This genre change is often accompanied by a shift in the guide's performance towards a more dramatic style and tone (cf. Kauppi 15-6). For example, as Auld Reekie tour guide David Swift comments: "the tour splits into two parts. The above-ground part … is more the historical stuff, the stuff about Edinburgh's characters," whereas "[w]hen we go underground, it's dark, it's smelly and you tell people ghost stories and that combination usually gets people at least on edge, if not absolutely terrified" (interview).

The version of the past presented to audiences of Edinburgh's ghost tours represents one of many possible "touristic discourses" on the city. In her work on guided boat and walking tours in Amsterdam, Heidi Dahles explores the role of these tours in constructing "different discourses for establishing the image of Amsterdam as a tourist centre" and in "the thematising and translation of urban space into touristic discourses" through which "the identity of the inner city is constructed" (228-9). Using the well-known terminology introduced by John Urry, she argues: "There is no single tourist gaze as such. One local setting is the object of many different … gazes" (239; cf. Urry 1-2; Cohen, "Tourist Guide" 14-5). Tellervo Kauppi makes a similar point in her study of

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For a wider discussion of the legend of Edinburgh's underground city, see Henderson, <u>Town</u>.

Figure 1.2. Auld Reekie Tours advertising boards, outside Tron Kirk, High Street.
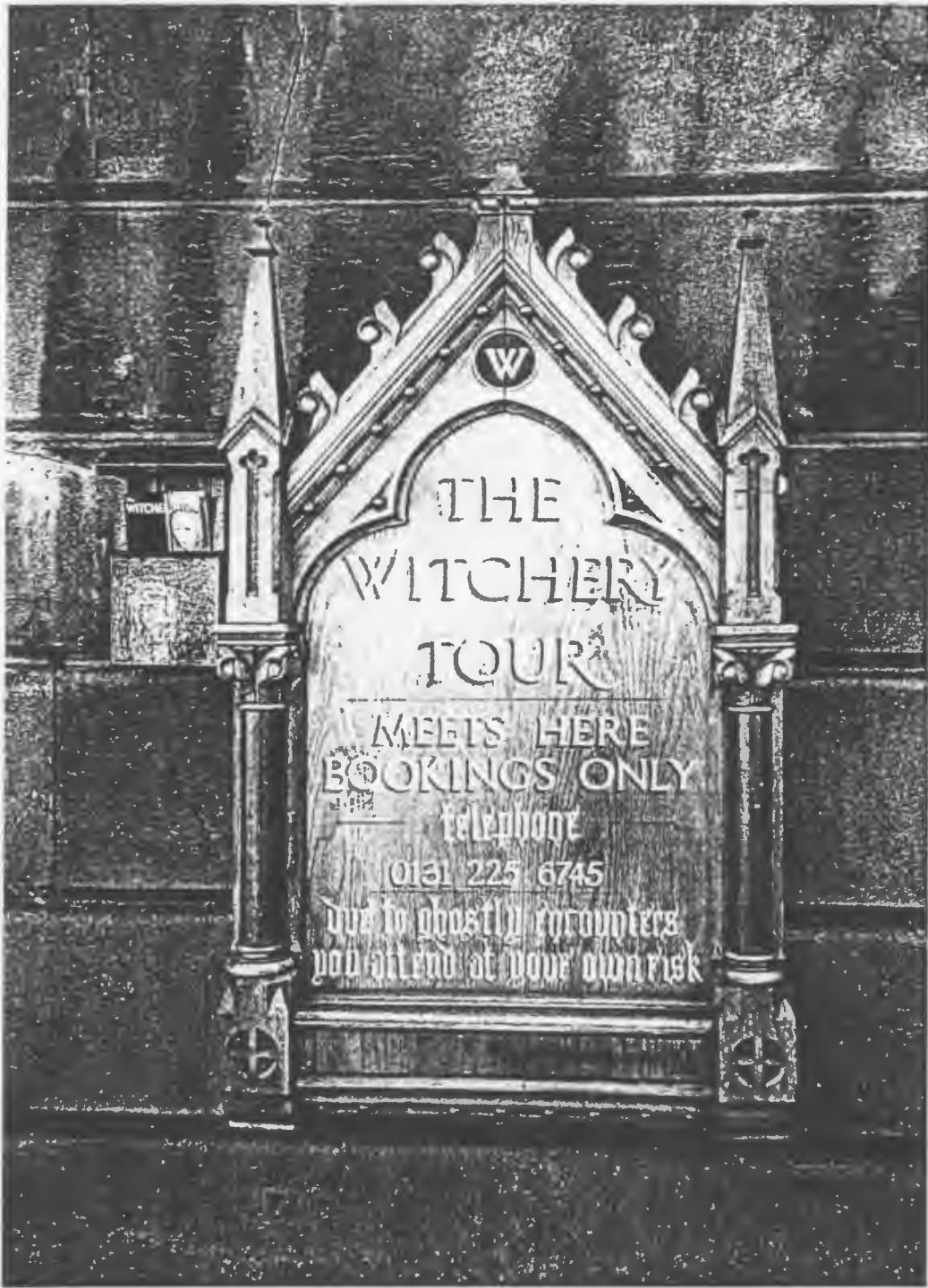
Figure 1.3. Witchery Tours advertising board, Castlehill.
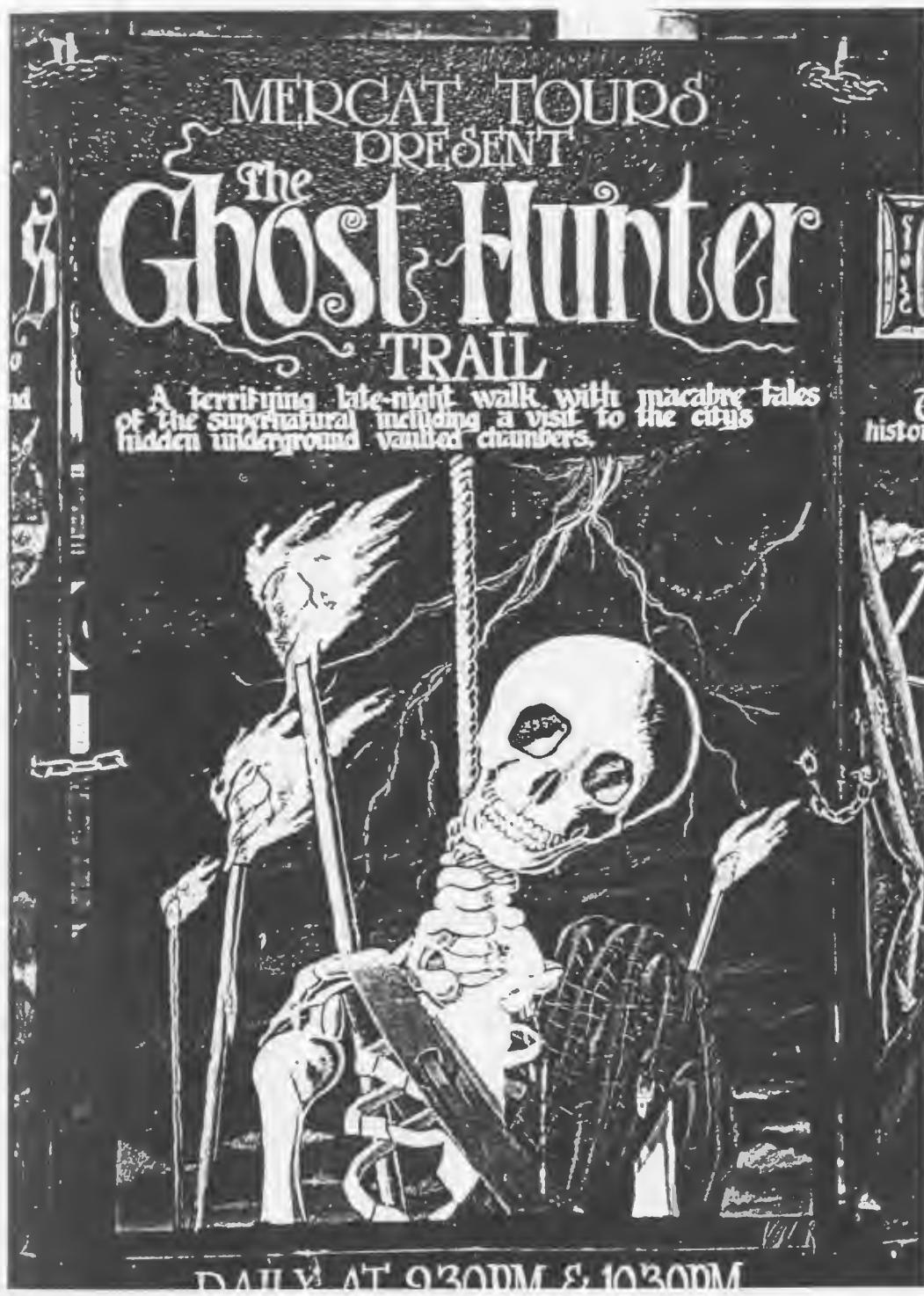
Figure 1.4. Mercat Tours advertising boards (detail), East Parliament Square.

Figure 1.5. "pretty dark, cobbled, very narrow and a bit scary": an Old Town close.

Figure 1.6. Mercat tour guide at work in "Edinburgh's underground city."

walking tours in Edinburgh, drawing a distinction between those tours which take place during the day, which are usually framed as "history" tours, and those generally referred to as ghost tours, which take place in the evening. Although both types of tour are often operated by the same companies,[9] Kauppi observes that the latter type offers a much "gloomier" perspective on the city's past. They emphasis "the darker side of life in Edinburgh" and focus on "death," "crime," "misery," "horror," "cruelty" and "filth," rather than "life and achievement," as do the daytime, history tours (9-10). Thus, within the same urban space, two distinct touristic discourses have constructed two almost entirely contrasting versions of the city's past.

As Kauppi's comment suggests, the vast majority of social historical stories told on the city's ghost tours can be categorised under the general subject headings of tortures and executions; waste disposal and the lack of sanitation in old Edinburgh; plague epidemics; trials and punishments for witchcraft; and body-snatching. The past which the city's ghost tour guides typically present to their audiences, then, is overwhelmingly violent, gory, superstitious, unsanitary and disease-ridden. As David Inglis and Mary Holmes observe in their work on ghosts in Scottish tourism, "Ghost tours are more than happy to tell 'grisly tales' of 'dark deeds,' and to present a few selected, unpleasant details of seventeenth and eighteenth century life. .... Rarely are attempts made to relate such happenings to the social and political factors governing pre- and early-modern urban

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[9] Mercat Tours, for example, offers the "Royal Mile Walk" and "Hidden Underground Vaults" tours during the day, while Robin's Tours operates a daytime "Grand Tour" as well as its nightly "Ghosts & Witches" tour (Mercat Tours and Robin's Tours, fliers).

life," since the tours are oriented primarily towards "the presentation not of actual social history with its sober facts and figures, but of a deliberately grotesque and exaggerated account of the past" (59). As Witchery Tours manager Lorna Baxter acknowledges: "We don't talk about the nice stuff at all, really, it is all the gory bits, which people do seem to enjoy" (interview).[10] Thus, for example, in the introduction to one tour I attended, City of the Dead tour guide Kate Kavanagh tells her audience: "We're going to tell you some stories about the people who used to live here and the disgusting, depraved, horrible things they all used to do to each other. Because they're obviously the best ones" (Kavanagh, tour). The introduction to one Witchery "Murder and Mystery Tour" I attended, meanwhile, states that it is:

> A tour unlike any other you might come across, because we deal specifically and intimately with the darker side of Edinburgh's history. We have stories and tales for you tonight about dark, morbid things, like [high-pitched scream] MURDER! ... A bit of witchcraft. ... A little bit of torture. ... A bit of filth. ... And a bit of pain and suffering... (Martin, tour)

Significantly, this version of the past, in Edinburgh as in a number of other cities in the UK and elsewhere, is fast becoming the accepted version of history in the popular imagination. As Auld Reekie's David Swift comments: "people that come on the tours have a vague idea that Edinburgh wasn't perhaps very nice, hundreds of years ago," a preconception which, in turn, helps to lend a perceived "aura of authenticity" to the ghost tour guide's tales of the city's "bloody past" (interview). In contributing to the

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[10] Similarly, Mercat tour guide Kathleen Brogan states that "I think human nature has a certain ghoulish side to it, whereby people ... enjoy hearing about torture and mangled thumbs and people being ripped apart. There is some bizarre fascination that people have with hearing these kind[s] of details" (interview).

perpetuation of this particular past, then, ghost tours represent one manifestation of a much wider phenomenon within the contemporary heritage industry, according to which, as David Lowenthal writes, the "infamies [of the past] are exaggerated" to the exclusion of its more "benign" aspects (Foreign 345). As Mercat tour guide Iain Cameron puts it, such tours are part of "a trend in recent years to try and bring that element of the past back to life: to point out how nasty, bloody, smelly, et cetera, it was" (interview). Thus Lowenthal describes how:

> The public gloats over gory tales of Jack the Ripper, scenes of execution at the Tower of London, the chamber of horrors at Madame Tussaud's, indulging tastes for the macabre safely displaced to bygone times. The London Dungeon advertises 'History written in blood! – the full horror of medieval Britain' as a family day-outing, and advocates Black Plaques to mark sites of executions, torture, squalor, and the plague pits and prisons of the past... Salem, Massachusetts, where nineteen people were hanged as witches, today exploits its ancient infamy as 'The Witch City' – 'You would not have liked being here in 1692,' but 'you really ought to experience it now ... Stop by for a spell.' (Foreign 345-6)

A number of other writers have also recognised the significance of death and the macabre as a motivation for and object of tourism. John Lennon and Malcolm Foley, for example, observe that "[v]isiting sites which could be said to be connected in some way to death (e.g., murder sites, death sites, battlefields, cemeteries, mausoleums, churchyards, the former houses of now-dead celebrities) is a significant part of tourist experiences in many societies" (Dark 4). They introduce the term "dark tourism" to refer to this phenomenon, "encompassing the visitation to any site associated with death, disaster and tragedy in the twentieth century for remembrance, education or entertainment" (Foley and Lennon, "Dark" 155; see also "Editorial" and "JFK"; cf. Deuchar; Smart). Similarly, Chris Rojek uses the term "black spots" to refer to "the

commercial developments of grave sites and sites in which celebrities or large numbers

of people have met with sudden and violent death." He observes that "interest in

catastrophes and disasters" is "widely shared" within contemporary Western culture, with

the result that "[d]eath sites … almost immediately take on a monumental quality" (136,

138). Peter Phipps, meanwhile, links such dark touristic forms to the search for authentic

or "real" experience in the context of contemporary tourism, arguing that the

commodification of death as "a macabre and fascinating tourist site … is due in part to

the state-regulated segregation and professionalization of death and dying in the

overdeveloped world, which adds further fuel to the notion that death, or … the dead, are

the ultimate signifier of the real" (83).

A. V. Seaton coins the term "thanatourism" (from thanatopsis, the "contemplation

of death") to refer to the phenomenon that Lennon and Foley call dark tourism, defining

it as "travel to a location wholly, or partially, motivated by the desire for actual or

symbolic encounters with death, particularly, but not exclusively, violent death" (240).

Although Lennon and Foley limit their definition of dark tourism to the sites of events

taking place since the beginning of the twentieth century,[11] Seaton takes a broader view.

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[11] As they state: "sites of events (broadly) prior to the start of the twentieth
century," though they may serve as tourism destinations and are often subject to
"commodification and commercialisation," nonetheless "do not qualify as 'dark tourism'
within our analysis for two main reasons. First, … [these] events did not take place
within the memories of those still alive to validate them. Second, [they] do not posit
questions, or induce anxiety and doubt about, modernity and its consequences" (Dark
12). The authors argue that the major role of "global communication technologies … in
creating the initial interest" in the site and the introduction of "anxiety and doubt about
the project of modernity" are "critical features" of dark tourism, leading them to interpret
the phenomenon as "an intimation of post-modernity." Key examples discussed within

He traces a number of historical links between thanatopsis and travel, describing how, from the Middle Ages, "Thanatopsis was a major element in pilgrimages made to the sites of the martyrdom or internment of saints where pilgrims viewed shrines to the dead and brought back mementoes, relics or ampullae" (236).[12] Later, the high Romantic period (1770-1830) saw "a great expansion of European travel which included thanatoptic elements," most notably "visits to locations of death and violence, both contemporary and historical, including castles, prisons, graveyards, battlefields and public executions" (239). Seaton goes on to describe how "[t]hanatourism has greatly expanded in the last 200 years" under "the influence of the media." Thus, for example, "Murder coverage in the nineteenth century press produced stampedes of visitors to death locations for sightseeing and souvenir hunting," while "[a]mong the ... attractions in the Chamber of Horrors [at Madame Tussaud's, London] of 1930 were: a guillotine, the last of the treadmills, the skull of Mrs Nicholson (the lady who attempted to assassinate George III), a pillory and the old toll bell from Newgate Prison" (242-3).

Although in the twentieth century Seaton observes that Western societies have "tended to conceal death and to regard any dwelling on it as morbid and even pathological," he argues that "death continues to exert a fascination and motivate travel in ways which are rarely openly admitted" (243). However, he points out that since thanatourism "addresses desires and interests which are not supposed to have a legitimate

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their analysis include sites relating to the Holocaust, the sinking of the <u>Titanic</u> and the assassination of John F. Kennedy (11).

[12] On the wider relationship between pilgrimage and tourism, see, for example, Cohen, "Pilgrimage"; Graburn; and MacCannell, "Staged" and <u>Tourist</u>.

existence within the secular, moral discourse of the twentieth century," "it is frequently presented as heritage, education, or history" (243-4). Significantly, this reframing of the touristic fascination with death and the macabre as "heritage" also permits the adoption of a less "sensitive" stance towards the interpretation of such dark subject matter. As Foley and Lennon argue of dark tourism: "Sites commemorating events within living memory generally require a more sympathetic and measured approach to interpretation and commercial development," whereas "sites with a greater 'chronological distance' from the tourist generally are interpreted in a less sensitive manner" and are less "problematical in terms of taste and decency" ("Dark" 156; "Editorial" 196; cf. Deuchar). That most ghost tours draw primarily on what Witchery's Lorna Baxter calls "well past history" (interview) thus permits a strong focus on entertainment, the third motivation identified by Lennon and Foley for visitation to dark tourism sites.[13] Witchery's Cameron Pirie observes, for example, that "the way we've done it, we've focused on the darker side of the history: hangings, murders, witchcraft, torture," but that the company's performances are based on the premise that "we can look back on it now with a laugh" (interview).

The centrality of humour within the discourses of many ghost tour operators accords with Kauppi's statement that a further key difference between history and ghost tours in Edinburgh lies in the fact that while "[i]n the day tours people come to learn, ...

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[13] As Lorna states: "we don't want to talk about something that happened twenty, thirty years ago. We want to talk about things that happened a hundred and fifty, two hundred years ago, so that there's not people left that know about – you know, we don't want to hurt anybody's feelings" (Baxter, interview).

the nightly ghost tours seem to serve better as entertainment" (11). The adoption of dramatic personae by guides is another feature which marks ghost tours using this technique as "entertainment" rather than "education." This feature arguably situates these tours generically closer to the theatrical performance than the guided tour, which is oriented, in contrast, primarily towards the communication of historical fact. As we will see, the dual goals of education and entertainment often lead to significant tensions within the discourses of ghost tour operators, as the need to present an entertaining performance for a paying audience may frequently require compromises to be made to the ideal of authenticity or historical accuracy.

As the above discussion has shown, then, although they are marketed specifically as "ghost tours," few such tours deal exclusively or even primarily with the supernatural. In fact, most ghost tour operators identify three key "ingredients" which together form a conveniently alliterative recipe for ghost tour success. According to this emic recipe, a good tour is one which "mixes history, humour and horror" to create a performance which is informative and entertaining and is also effective in scaring the audience (City of the Dead, http://www.blackhart.uk.com/). Trainee guides at Edinburgh's Mercat Tours, for example, are instructed that "[e]ach tour should be a balance of historical fact, humour and scariness," although "different groups will require different levels of the above ingredients" (McBrierty, "Storytelling" 1). Similarly, a Witchery Tours flier informs potential audience members that "[y]our ghostly guide will blend history with humour," while the Ghost Hunt of York advertises that its tour "takes your emotions from horror to hilarity" (flier).

The broad theme of the supernatural – whether expressed in the ghostly narratives told by guides, in the "genuine haunted locations" visited on the tours (Mercat Tours, http://www.mercat-tours.co.uk/) or in the encounters with otherworldly entities frequently promised tour participants – corresponds to just one of these three ingredients: that of "horror," or scaring the audience. Although this is seen by most ghost tour operators as an important element of a successful tour performance, the majority nonetheless claim that their primary objective is to educate their audiences about "the history" of Edinburgh. Mercat's Frances McBrierty, for example, states that "I would have to say that the history [is] the … most important thing," while Robin Mitchell of Witchery Tours, a company whose performance aesthetic is, as we will see, in many ways diametrically opposed to that of Mercat, similarly comments that "the crux of the tour[s] is the historical base" (McBrierty, interview; Mitchell, quoted in Mathers 23). Lastly, most ghost tour operators are also concerned with providing an entertaining experience for a paying audience, a concern which corresponds roughly to the second of the three emic ingredients, that of "humour."

Almost every ghost tour operator, then, exhibits some level of concern with all three of the ingredients of this emic recipe for ghost tour success. In practice, however, different companies tend to focus on one or other of these elements, developing "specialities" which they use to distinguish their own performances from those of other local tour operators and which thus become central to the way in which their identities are perceived both internally, by their own employees, and externally by others within the industry and the public at large. This thesis is primarily concerned with the ways in

which three Edinburgh-based ghost tour operators have constructed their respective corporate identities on the basis of their own particular specialities and with the discursive strategies by means of which they present those identities to their internal and external audiences.

City of the Dead cofounder Jan Henderson encapsulates the self-images projected by the tour operators studied in this thesis when he states that prior to the founding of his own company, "there were three existing big ghost tour companies in Edinburgh. Each of them had a speciality: Auld Reekie was the scary one, Witchery was the funny one, Mercat was the historically accurate one" (interview). Even a cursory glance at the discourses of the companies under consideration begins to reveal ways in which they have constructed their identities based on the above specialities. Mercat, for example, advertises that its guides are all "university-trained historians" (flier), reflecting its status as "the historically accurate one," while Witchery's tours are billed as "a light-hearted look at Edinburgh's darker side" (flier), suggesting the more humorous nature of its performances. For the purposes of this study, City of the Dead itself takes the place of Auld Reekie as "the scary one." This third company's identity is largely based on the premise that "we appear to be the only ghost tour company [in Edinburgh] that has a real ghost" (Henderson, interview). Promising its audiences the "unforgettable" experience of being "locked in a graveyard at night with an active poltergeist" (flier), it exhibits an unusually strong emphasis on the last of the three ingredients identified above, that of "horror."

In the chapters which follow, the identities of these three companies will be analysed in turn, focusing on the discourse of each. The term discourse is used in this context to refer to each company's attitudes, values and aesthetics – what Mercat's Frances McBrierty calls its "ethos" (interview) – as expressed through the many different forms and types of communication it generates, including publicity materials; internal documents; statements made by employees; the training processes undertaken by new guides; and the selection and interpretation of material for presentation, as well as the tour performances themselves. As George Hughes writes:

> Discourse encompasses ... 'all forms of spoken interaction, formal and informal, and written texts of all kinds.' But ... discourse is more 'active' than this. It categorizes phenomena and provides frameworks through which 'reality' may be discussed. Therefore, discourse is not neutral, in the sense of simply reporting reality, but is a system of statements through which reality is constructed. (796-7, quoting J. Potter and M. Wetherell)

In focusing my analysis at the level of discourse, I draw in particular on Richard Handler and Eric Gable's conception of the heritage site as "a social arena in which many people of differing backgrounds continuously and routinely interact to produce, exchange and consume messages" and on their emphasis on the need to study "the social processes of message making" in this context (9, 11).

The two chapters which follow compare the contrasting discourses of Mercat and Witchery Tours. This discussion draws on two dichotomous concepts running throughout recent scholarship on tourism and heritage: the modernistic notion of tourism as a "quest for authenticity," on the one hand, and, conversely, the concept of postmodern tourism as "play." Thus, the analysis of the discourse of Mercat Tours presented in Chapter Two is informed by recent scholarship that presents authenticity as the primary

motivating factor of modern tourism, a concept first introduced by Dean MacCannell (see Tourist; "Staged"). The chapter begins by tracing such scholarship from the cognitive objectivist conceptualisation of authenticity which informs the work of MacCannell, Boorstin and others, to the constructivist perspective which informs my own analysis and according to which, as Ning Wang writes, "what [tourists] seek is not objective authenticity ... but a symbolic authenticity which is the result of social construction" (54, emphasis in original). It goes on to discuss three distinct but interrelated ways in which the concept of authenticity is constructed and presented within the Mercat Tours discourse: authenticity as originality, authenticity as historical accuracy and authenticity as performance.

The first of these constructs enables the company to claim authenticity through its status as the founder of "[t]he original Edinburgh Ghost tour" (Mercat Tours, flier), while also tracing this claim considerably further back in time by consciously reinventing the "tradition of cadies," a society of men who showed visitors around the city in centuries gone by (Brogan, interview). Secondly, conceptualising authenticity as historical accuracy provides a basis for the company's claim to present "just the facts," by which it positions itself in opposition to the practice of "making things up" allegedly indulged in by the city's other ghost tour operators. This claim effectively ignores the processes of selectivity, interpretation and invention involved in producing the history presented on Mercat's own tours. Lastly, the company also locates authenticity in its performance techniques. This conceptualisation of authenticity as performance is explored by considering the models of the in/authentic ghost tour performance constructed within the

company's own discourse and in particular its ambiguous stance towards "the actor identity" (Snow 132) and the use of theatrical performance techniques. I argue that while the company employs a rhetoric of authenticity to construct a dichotomy between its own performances and those of other companies which use such theatrical techniques, aspects of its own performances and the attitudes of some of its individual guides in practice contrast significantly with the claims presented by this rhetoric.

Chapter Three uses the case of Witchery Tours to exemplify the relatively recent concept of postmodern- or "post-tourism," in which context tourism has come to be seen as a playful "game" rather than a serious "quest." My analysis is informed by the work of scholars who argue that "the 'search for authenticity' is too simple a foundation for much of contemporary tourism" (Wang 46, quoting John Urry) and by their identification of an "apparently pervasive shift in the dominant mode of experience desired by contemporary tourists" (Cohen, "Contemporary" 21). The rise of playfulness as the new "dominant mode" within postmodern tourism is shown to be accompanied by "an aesthetic enjoyment of surfaces for their own sake, whatever their cognitive status may be," and by the dissolution or nivellation of the boundaries between representation and reality, among other typically postmodern traits (Cohen, "Contemporary" 21-2). This chapter aims to contribute an ethnographic perspective to the literature on post-tourism by applying such concepts to the case of Witchery Tours. It explores the company's explicit rejection of authenticity as the dominant value of the ghost tour performance and its active embracing of the theatrical performance aesthetic perceived by Mercat as "faking."

As in Chapter Two, my analysis is structured around several interrelated meanings of a single concept which runs throughout the company's discourse and which, in Witchery's case, encapsulates the playful essence of the post-touristic ethos: that of light-heartedness. Firstly, I argue, light-heartedness signifies a much lesser concern with historical accuracy than that which characterises the discourse of Mercat Tours, with the result that the style of the performance takes on a significance of its own, independent of its status as a vehicle for the communication of historical information. Secondly, light-heartedness manifests itself in the "celebration of fictive and dramaturgical values" identified by scholars as a key characteristic of post-tourism (Rojek 134) and in particular in Witchery's espousal of "the actor identity" and its emphasis on "visual spectacle and play" (Urry 84). Thirdly, light-heartedness relates to the way in which participants on the company's tours enjoy a "postmodern thrill" generated by the "interplay of contradictory categories" in the context of its performances (Snow 208, 192). I show how Witchery's guides purposely move between discourse and story space in order to focus their audiences' attention away from the tours' referential content and towards the performance frame itself. Lastly, I highlight the company's use of the term light-heartedness to refer to the fact that its performances are not, nor are they intended to be, genuinely fear-inducing. This is evidenced in the contrast drawn by employees between the "frights" given its audiences by the jumper-outer on their tours and experiences which they perceive to generate "genuine" fear. All four of these meanings of light-heartedness are shown to be symptomatic of an overarching postmodern touristic ethos at work within the discourse of Witchery Tours.

Chapter Four analyses the discourse of a third and final company, City of the

Dead. In contrast to that of Witchery Tours, the discourse of this last company is focused

primarily on the production of a genuinely frightening experience for its audiences. This

is based on the promise of a firsthand encounter with a supernatural entity which the

company has named the Mackenzie Poltergeist. Comparatively little work has been

undertaken on the role of fear in the context of contemporary tourism and therefore this

chapter aims to forge new ground rather than situating itself within a particular scholarly

context. The first part of the chapter explores the process by which City of the Dead has

constructed a coherent narrative around the Mackenzie Poltergeist phenomenon for

presentation in its promotional materials, on its tours themselves and to the public at

large. In particular, it demonstrates how this narrative is characterised by a tension

between "explanation" and "mystery" which serves to heighten the draw of the

supernatural encounter which the company promises its audiences. The second section of

the chapter goes on to explore the ostensive dimension of the Mackenzie Poltergeist

narrative. That is, I look at the ways in which the story constructed by the company is

actively enacted through the tour performance itself. The performance techniques used

by the company's guides to build up anticipation and fear during the course of each tour

are analysed in depth. I also consider the extent to which the tour can be read, like

Witchery's as a "game." Do audience members enjoy an entertainingly frightening

experience because of the knowledge that they are never in any actual danger? Or,

conversely, should the tour be understood as a genuinely terrifying encounter with an

entity which constantly threatens to overcome the tour company's attempts to explain and

control it?  The thesis concludes with a summary of key findings and an indication of further research directions.

I begin, however, with a consideration of Mercat Tours and the construction of multiple meanings of authenticity with which it legitimates its own particular portrayal of Edinburgh's "bloody past."

# Chapter Two: MERCAT TOURS

## AND THE TOURISM OF AUTHENTICITY

**"history is a damned good story; it just needs damned good telling"**

**– Brogan, quoted in Collier 24**

This chapter analyses the discourse of Mercat Tours, Edinburgh's longest-established and largest ghost tour company.  Founded in 1985 by four teachers of history at local Edinburgh high schools,[1] the company takes its name from the city's Mercat [Market] Cross which stands in East Parliament Square on the Royal Mile, from which point all of its tours begin.[2]  At the time of my field research, the company employed around fifty guides, the majority of whom were students working on a part-time basis to help fund their studies, while a significant minority worked in other occupations during the day.  In addition, Mercat employed a management team which included Frances McBrierty (general manager), Fran Hollinrake (research officer) and Gordon Stewart (marketing manager).  The company was directed by its one remaining cofounder, Des

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[1] Des Brogan (Holyrood High School), Alan Wilson (James Gillespie's High School), Frank McGrail (Portobello High School) and Martin Bryden (Craigmount High School).

[2] On the cultural significance of market crosses as "the focal point of Scotland's historical burghs" and their potential value as "heritage assets," see Thomson and Urquhart (461, 466).

Brogan, who had left teaching in 1996 in order "to devote all his attention to the business" (Collier 24).

Mercat operates two ghost tours, the "Ghosts & Ghouls" tour and "The GhostHunter Trail." At the time of my field research, the former ran nightly at 7pm and 8pm year-round and cost £7.50 including "a drink in an ancient city tavern" at the end of the tour. It is advertised as "[t]he original Edinburgh Ghost tour" (Mercat Tours, flier) and was the first tour introduced by the company in 1985. Audience members are invited to "[j]oin one of our guides on a journey through the closes and wynds of the citys [sic] haunted underworld and hear tales of Old Edinburgh" (flier). The latter part of the tour takes place in a section of the city's underground vaults located under the southern end of South Bridge, off South Niddry Street, to which the company gained access in 1995 (McBrierty, interview). After the visit to the vaults, audience members have the option of continuing on a nearby pub, the White Horse Inn, where the guide tells more stories over a complimentary drink in a private (and allegedly haunted) back room. The total duration of the tour including the visit to the tavern is approximately 2¼ hours.

At the time of my field research, "The GhostHunter Trail" ran nightly at 9.30pm year-round and additionally at 10.30pm ("The Midnight Tour") from April through October. The tour is advertised as "1½ Hours of Horror for £6" and is "[a] terrifying late-night walk with macabre tales of the supernatural" (Mercat Tours, advertising board; flier). As the company's website reads: "This special late night walk caters for those who prefer their tales after dark…. The GhostHunter Trail is an entertaining and thoroughly ghastly tour of Edinburgh's horrific history" (http://www.mercat-tours.co.uk/). Like the

"Ghosts & Ghouls" tour, "The GhostHunter Trail" takes audience members around some of the closes and wynds surrounding the Royal Mile before proceeding to the underground vaults. The final section of the tour takes place in the graveyard of Canongate Kirk, near the foot of the Royal Mile. This tour lasts around ninety minutes.

In addition to its two ghost tours, Mercat also operates three daytime, historical tours: "The Royal Mile Walk" and "Hidden Underground Vaults" in the city centre and a tour of "Hidden Historic Leith," Edinburgh's neighbouring port. At the time of my field research, the company was also contracted by Edinburgh City Council to conduct tours in Mary King's Close, whose residents are popularly believed to have been walled into the close during a plague epidemic in the city in 1645 and which now lies underneath the City Chambers on the High Street (see Wilson et al., Hidden 2-22). Mercat's guides are also involved in conducting the four tours operated by its affiliated company, Robin's Tours: the "Ghosts & Witches Tour" and three history tours, "The Grand Tour," the "Royal Mile Walk" and "Hidden Historic Vaults" (see Robin's Tours, fliers).

Mercat is the only Edinburgh-based ghost tour company which operates regular tours outwith the city, conducting two ghost tours and a seasonal history tour in Glasgow (see Mercat Tours, "Gruesome"). In addition, it organises regular educational tours to the battlefields of northern France (http://www.mercat-tours.co.uk). Its tours have featured in local and national press as well as on radio and television (e.g., see "Acting up"; "City history man"; Clough; Collier; Davidson; Hamilton). Members of the company's management have written two books based on stories told on its tours (see Wilson et al., Ghostly and Hidden). Mercat has been awarded "Commended" status in the Visitor

Attractions category by the Scottish Tourist Board and in 2001 it won an STB Scottish Thistle Award in the category of Cultural Tourism (advertising board).

Mercat has as its "speciality" the first of the three emic ingredients for ghost tour success identified in Chapter One, that of "history," constructing itself both externally and internally as "the historically accurate one" (Henderson, interview). As I argue in this chapter, however, its concern for historical accuracy represents just one manifestation of an overarching, multifaceted ideology of authenticity at work within the company's discourse, which fundamentally informs its activities at a number of levels. The case of Mercat Tours thus epitomises the model of modern tourism as a "quest for authenticity" (MacCannell, Tourist; see also "Staged") which has dominated much of recent tourism research. I begin, therefore, by tracing the development of the concept of authenticity within the literature on tourism and heritage, from the cognitive objectivist approach exemplified by the work of Daniel Boorstin and Dean MacCannell, to the constructivist approach which informs my own analysis, and the corresponding shift from an etic to an emic perspective on authenticity in tourism.

In particular, my arguments are influenced by Edward Bruner's observation that authenticity may be conceived and presented in multiple ways within the same touristic discourse and that the relationships among these different meanings of authenticity may be characterised by "paradoxes, ambiguities, and ironies" (405). Accordingly, in the subsequent sections of this chapter, I identify three distinct but interrelated conceptualisations of authenticity within the Mercat Tours discourse: authenticity as originality, authenticity as historical accuracy and authenticity as performance, exploring

the complexities and tensions which exist within and between these multiple meanings of the concept. Most notably, I argue that the construction of multiple and often contradictory meanings of authenticity within the company's discourse reveals that, as Wang observes, "authenticity is not an either/or matter, but rather involves a much wider spectrum, rich in ambiguity" (51).

## Authenticity in Tourism

The complexity of authenticity in tourist experiences has been and continues to be a central concern in the literature on tourism and heritage.[3] Until relatively recently, however, most of the research conducted into the nature of authenticity in tourism was informed by a cognitive objectivist conception of authenticity, according to which "'[a]uthenticity' … takes up a given or 'objective' quality attributable by moderns to the world 'out there'" (Cohen, "Authenticity" 374). Two frequently cited proponents of this approach are historian Daniel Boorstin and sociologist Dean MacCannell. Although both authors' work has its basis in a cognitive objectivist conception of authenticity, each arrives at a very different conclusion with regard to the significance of authenticity in the context of modern tourism. In his scathing critique of the modern American tourist in his book, The Image (77-117), Boorstin argues that mass tourism is "governed by the law of

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[3] See, for example, Bendix, "Quest"; Bruner; Cohen, "Authenticity" and "Contemporary"; Crang; Evans-Pritchard; Fowler, "Heritage" and Past; Halewood and Hannam; Handler; Handler and Gable; Handler and Saxton; Hannabuss; Hughes; Kirshenblatt-Gimblett; MacCannell, "Staged" and Tourist; McCrone et al.; Macdonald; Moscardo and Pearce; Overton; Pearce and Moscardo; Turner and Manning; and Wang.

pseudo-events, by which the image, the well-contrived imitation, outshines the original"

(107). It thereby exemplifies the inauthenticity of modern life. As he writes:

> [tourist] 'attractions' offer an elaborately contrived indirect experience, an artificial product to be consumed in the very places where the real thing is as free as air. ... They keep the natives in quarantine whilst the tourist in air-conditioned comfort views them through a picture window. They are the cultural mirages now found at tourist oases everywhere. (99)

As Wang points out, Boorstin's concept of "pseudo-events" is based on an objectivist notion of authenticity since it implies that "[tourists] are seldom able to see through the inauthenticity of contrived attractions" (50). Thus a cognitive objectivist conception of authenticity leads Boorstin and those who adopt his approach "to dismiss tourism as a frivolous activity, reflecting the superficiality of contemporary mass culture and devoid of any intrinsic significance" (Cohen, "Play" 292).

Dean MacCannell shares Boorstin's concern for the inauthenticity of modern life. Unlike Boorstin, however, MacCannell seeks to identify the ways in which the alienated modern individual attempts to overcome this lack of authenticity through tourism, by "seek[ing] authenticity elsewhere in other times and other places": in "the pristine, the primitive, the natural, that which is as yet untouched by modernity" (Cohen, "Traditions" 33; "Authenticity" 374). According to MacCannell, then, tourism is symptomatic of "[t]he modern disruption of real life and the simultaneous emergence of a fascination with the 'real life' of others" (Tourist 91). As such, his analysis is in direct contrast to Boorstin's. For MacCannell, it is the quest for authenticity and not the desire for illusions that provides the motivation for modern tourism. As he states: "None of the

accounts in my collection support Boorstin's contention that tourists want superficial, contrived experiences. Rather, tourists demand authenticity just as Boorstin does" (Tourist 104).

MacCannell argues, however, that although "the tourist may believe that he is moving in this direction [i.e., towards authentic experiences], ... often it is very difficult to know for sure if the experience is in fact authentic" (Tourist 101). Specifically, he identifies "a new kind of social space" which, he argues, is opening up everywhere in our society. Here authenticity is "staged" by tourist producers and natives in order fraudulently to convince tourists that they have gained access to the host society's authentic "back regions" (cf. Goffman 144-5). As he writes: "It is always possible that what is taken to be entry into a back region is really entry into a front region that has been totally set up in advance for touristic visitation" ("Staged" 597). As a result, all that the tourist can ever hope to achieve in her quest for authentic experiences is "increasingly apparent authenticity" (Tourist 99, emphasis added). MacCannell calls this new kind of space, "touristic space," arguing that "once tourists have entered touristic space, there is no way out for them so long as they press their search for authenticity" (Tourist 106; see also "Staged").

Thus, as Erik Cohen writes, in MacCannell's analysis the "inauthenticity of tourist experiences is ... not a consequence of the tourist's superficial desire for the spurious and illusory, as Boorstin argued, but rather a structural consequence of the development of tourism" itself ("Traditions" 34). However, MacCannell's work, like

Boorstin's, nonetheless implies a cognitive objectivist conception of authenticity. As Wang argues, MacCannell's tourists are engaged in "a quest for the authenticity of originals, and consequently become the victims of staged authenticity. Thus, their experiences cannot be considered authentic even if they themselves think they have had authentic experiences" (51).

Subsequent tourism researchers have characterised both Boorstin's and MacCannell's approaches to authenticity in modern tourism as overly simplistic. Cognitive objectivist approaches have been largely superseded by constructivist perspectives within which authenticity is regarded as a social construct. This new approach is exemplified in Cohen's assertion that rather than "a given or 'objective' quality," "'authenticity' is a socially constructed concept and its social ... connotation is, therefore, not given, but 'negotiable'" ("Authenticity" 374; see also Bruner 408; Hughes 781). James Overton makes this point particularly clear:

> Authenticity is not 'out there' to be tracked down. It is not a quality which exists in things, but a 'cultural construct,' a taste which is part and parcel of a particular aesthetic. Just as 'tradition' and 'the historic' are constructed by particular people in the present, so, too, with authenticity. It follows that authenticity can never be 'staged' or 'spurious.' (164)

According to the constructivist approach, then, the tourist perceives her experiences as authentic "not because they are originals or reality but because they are perceived as the signs or symbols of authenticity" (Wang 54). As a result, we would expect to find tourism producers engaged in the production of such symbols for presentation to their audiences.

As proponents of the constructivist approach have argued, if authenticity is thus a negotiable cultural construct, then "[t]he manner of the negotiation of its meaning should hence be made a major topic in the ... study of tourism" (Cohen, "Authenticity" 374). Investigation of this topic has come about largely through a further, related development in recent tourism research: the shift from an etic to an emic perspective on the tourist (cf. Cohen, "Authenticity" 377-9). The adoption of an emic perspective within tourism research has the potential to reveal how and why authenticity is constructed, presented, perceived and consumed in particular ways within the touristic context. It allows that "[i]nstead of asking whether the tourist's experience is authentic, one can now ask what is the connotation and denotation of authenticity in the tourist's own eyes: that is, what he considers to be the essential marks of authenticity, and which sites, objects and events on his trip do, in his opinion, possess these marks" (Cohen, "Traditions" 37, emphases in original). As Alma Gottlieb writes: the emic perspective is based on "the premise that what the vacationer experiences is real, valid and fulfilling, no matter how 'superficial' it may seem to the social scientist" (167; see also Pearce and Moscardo).

The majority of studies conducted into emic conceptualisations of authenticity in tourism to date have focused on the perspective of the tourist herself. As I demonstrate in this chapter, however, an emic approach to authenticity in tourism can be applied not only to the consumers of tourist experiences but also to their producers. Edward Bruner's work on the New Salem living history site in Illinois is thus particularly pertinent to my own analysis in this chapter, as he highlights the existence of multiple meanings of

authenticity as used and perceived by the producers of this particular site.[5]  Bruner points out that "the meaning of any expression is not a property inherent in the wording or in the dictionary, but rather is dependent on the perceptions and practices of those who use the expression" (399; cf. 407).  Crucially, he states that in his fieldwork at the New Salem site: "My aim was to understand the different meanings of authenticity as employed in social practice rather than to accept at face value the usually unexamined dichotomy between what is and what is not authentic" (401).

Bruner identifies four meanings of authenticity as the term is used by museum professionals working at the site, meanings which are based, respectively, on conceptions of "verisimilitude, genuineness, originality, and authority."  Firstly, then, "Authentic means credible and convincing," as evidenced in the museum professionals' description of their site as an "authentic reproduction" (399).  By this, Bruner argues, the professionals "acknowledge that New Salem is a reproduction, not an original; but they want that reproduction to be authentic in the sense of ... 'historical verisimilitude'" or "mimetic credibility."  Secondly, the word authentic is used to mean "a complete and immaculate simulation, one that is historically accurate and true" to the period being simulated.  Bruner goes on to describe two further meanings of authenticity as the term is used at New Salem: "In the third sense, it means original, as opposed to a copy.... In the

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[5] Bruner makes it clear that tourists and tourism producers may conceive of authenticity in different ways, pointing out that "[i]t would be a mistake to assume that the distinctions made in [his] essay about the concept of authenticity used by museum professionals would necessarily be the same distinctions made by the tourists.  Museum professionals are the producers, whereas tourists are the consumers, and they do not approach the site in the same way" (406).

fourth sense, [it] means duly authorized, certified, or legally valid" (400). Bruner's

identification of these four different meanings of authenticity within the discourse of New

Salem provides a model for the investigation of the multiple conceptualisations of

authenticity which are identified, in this chapter, within the discourse of Mercat Tours.

Bruner's observations concerning the contested nature of authenticity at New

Salem, moreover, accord with the complex and often contradictory relationships that

exist between and within the different meanings of authenticity that are constructed and

presented within the Mercat Tours discourse. In describing the "many conscious

compromises to authenticity" at the New Salem site, for example, Bruner identifies "a

tension between the first and second meanings of authenticity," that is, between

authenticity as verisimilitude and as genuineness (402). He describes, for example, how

"[t]he houses at the 1990s New Salem represent the original 1830s houses, thus they are

weathered to look old so that they will be more credible... The 1830s houses, however,

actually looked much newer, as the village of New Salem was founded in 1829 and

abandoned by 1839, a period of only ten years." Thus the weathering of the houses

"makes the site more believable to 1990s tourists [authenticity as verisimilitude], but less

true to the 1830s original [authenticity as genuineness]" (402). Bruner cites a number of

similar examples at the site, concluding that:

> Authenticity is a struggle. From the point of view of the professional
> staff, who have the goal of making New Salem a believable or genuine
> reproduction, one constantly has to be aware of possible inauthenticities.
> But there are even more fundamental problems, as the inauthentic is built
> into the fabric of New Salem, into the details of construction, and into the
> social practices of production at the site. (403)

A similar interpretation of authenticity as a "struggle" informs Marc Kuly's work on the Lower Fort Garry living history site in Manitoba. Kuly contrasts "accuracy" with "authenticity." He writes that accuracy is "guided by curatorial ideals of perfection and attention to the historical record" while authenticity depends on "an impressionistic sense of what 'feels' right and the attempt to evoke feelings about the past." He notes that although the two "often co-exist in harmony," "there have been many instances … wherein the two principles have led to disagreement and conflict at the site" (n.p.). In a similar way, in the pages that follow, I argue that the notion of authenticity as a "struggle" characterised by "paradoxes, ambiguities, and ironies" (Bruner 405) is fundamental to an understanding of the ideology of authenticity within the discourse of Mercat Tours and to the process by which the company constructs its corporate identity both externally and internally. I do so by exploring three distinct but interrelated conceptualisations of authenticity within the company's discourse: authenticity as originality, authenticity as historical accuracy and authenticity as performance.

## Authenticity as originality: "Beware of pale imitations"

Perhaps the most immediately obvious manifestation of an ideology of authenticity at work within the Mercat Tours discourse is to be found in the company's rhetoric of authenticity as originality. This is equivalent to the third meaning of authenticity identified by Bruner at the New Salem site (400; cf. Wang 48, 50-1). On a flier advertising the company's "Corporate Hospitality and Specialist Tours," for

example, we read: "Established in 1985, Mercat Tours has become renowned as the

PREMIER walking tour company in Edinburgh and beyond. ... Our GHOSTS AND

GHOULS tour was the first ghost tour in Edinburgh and remains hugely popular as the

ORIGINAL and the BEST!" (Mercat Tours, "Corporate").  The word premier

encapsulates the meaning of authenticity as it is invoked in this context, combining the

dual connotations of "original" and "best," "first" and "finest" (http://www.mercat-

tours.co.uk/), and thereby implying that the company's temporal precedence

automatically guarantees the superior quality, status and authenticity of its product.

Despite the fact that the actual time-difference between the founding of the city's first

two ghost tour companies, Mercat and Witchery Tours, appears to have been relatively

insignificant,[6] the former's rhetoric of authenticity as originality acts as an important

means by which it constructs its performances as the only authentic ghost tour experience

in the city.  Thus, for example, an advertisement for the company's tours in a local tourist

publication warns potential audience members to "[b]eware of pale imitations: make sure

you're with Mercat" ("Edinburgh's No. 1").[7]

In fact, the company traces its claim to authenticity as originality considerably

further back in time than its own founding in 1985 when it invites potential audience

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[6] In their promotional materials and other documents, both companies give the date of their establishment variously as 1984 or 1985, giving rise to some doubt as to which is in fact the longer-established of the two.

[7] York's longest-established ghost tour company employs a similar rhetoric of authenticity as originality, most obviously manifest in its name: The Original Ghost Walk of York (est. c.1973).  In its promotional materials we read that "[t]he Walk was established before 1973 [sic] and was an original creation believed to be the first in the world" (flier; http://www.yorkshirenet.co.uk/yorkghostwalk/).

members to "[f]ollow an ancient tradition by seeking a guide at the Mercat [Market]

Cross … in the heart of Edinburgh's Royal Mile" (Mercat Tours, "Royal"; see Figure

2.1). This is a reference to the society of cadies who guided visitors around the city in

centuries gone by. The Scottish National Dictionary describes how, from the early

eighteenth century, the Scots term cadie (variously spelt caddie, caddy, cawdy or

cawdey) came to be applied to "[o]ne who earned a living by running errands, lighting

the way in the dark with lanterns, etc.," a usage which originated as the name given to "a

number of such persons who formed an organised corps in Edinburgh and other large

towns" during the period (Grant II: 7). One visitor to the city in the later eighteenth

century describes the cadies as:

> a Society of men who constantly attend the Cross in the High-street [on
> the Royal Mile], and whose office it is to do any thing that any body can
> want, and discharge any kind of business. On this account it is necessary
> for them to make themselves acquainted with the residence and
> negotiation of all the inhabitants; and they are of great utility, as without
> them it would be very difficult to find any body. (Topham 86-7; see also
> Burt I: 23-5)

By presenting its guides as modern-day cadies, then, Mercat enhances the

authenticity of its performances by constructing its tours as a continuation of a "tradition"

of guiding in the city stretching back to the 1700s. As tour guide Kathleen Brogan tells

her audience in the introduction to one tour I attended: "[this] would … be where you'd

come for a guide, or a cadie, to take you round the city if you weren't too sure of your

bearings. In a way, you're keeping this tradition going, because you're coming up here

for a guide yourselves" (Brogan and Cameron). The Mercat tour guides' self-

presentation as "cadies" thus recalls Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger's now-
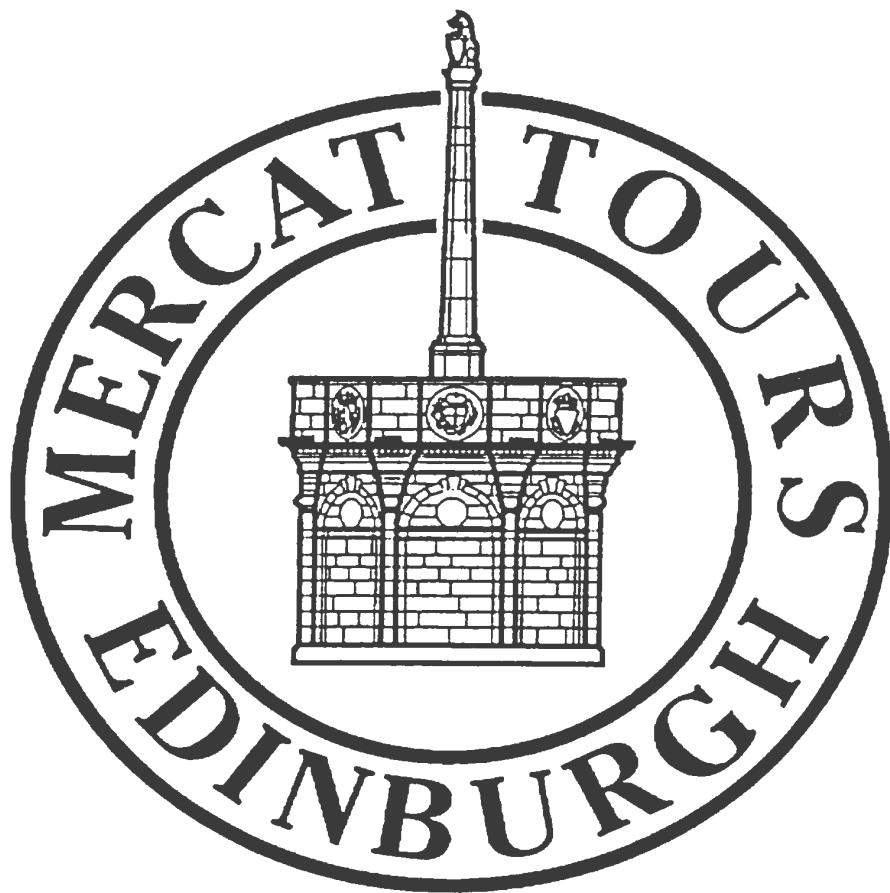
Figure 2.1. "following an ancient tradition": all of Mercat's tours begin at the Mercat Cross in East Parliament Square, historical meeting-point of the <u>cadies</u> who guided visitors around the city in centuries gone by. The significance of the Cross within the Mercat Tours discourse is indicated by its inclusion on the company's logo and of course in the name of the company itself.

canonical analysis of <u>The Invention of Tradition</u>, in which the authors argue that so-called invented traditions "normally attempt to establish continuity with a suitable historic past," a continuity which, however, is usually "largely factitious" (1-2).[8]

In fact, Mercat's appropriation of the "tradition" of <u>cadies</u> can more appropriately be characterised as an instance of the "<u>re</u>-invention of tradition," a term recently introduced by Cath Oberholtzer to refer to "a re-introduction and expansive adoption of an actual historic and ethnographically documented tradition" (142). Significantly, the term "reinvention" is used emically by Mercat's employees themselves to describe the relationship of the company's performances to the earlier "tradition" of <u>cadies</u>, suggesting that the company is self-conscious in its use of this particular authenticating strategy. For example, during the interview I conducted with Kathleen, she links her role as tour guide to that of "a <u>cadie</u> taking you round, telling you about the different areas," explaining that "<u>cadies</u>, the old Scots guides, used to start from the Mercat Cross, so that's why we start there. We're reinventing the tradition of <u>cadies</u>" (Brogan).[9]

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[8] For discussions of the "invention of tradition," see, for example, Anderson, <u>Imagined</u>; Bendix, "Tourism"; Bowman; Briggs; Bruner; de Caro; Dorson; Evans-Pritchard; Handler and Linnekin; Hanson; Hobsbawm and Ranger; Jones; Linnekin; Mason and Condon; Oberholtzer; Upton; and Wood.

[9] Mercat is not the only Edinburgh-based ghost tour company whose employees identify themselves with the "tradition of <u>cadies</u>." In her work on the city's ghost tours, Caroline Mathers writes that employees of Witchery Tours also "describe themselves as modern day Cadies" (5). In fact, the latter company's full title is The Cadies/Witchery Tours and on its website we read: "Cadies were the 18th century messenger boys who, as well as delivering goods and messages, would show visitors safely around the narrow closes and wynds of Edinburgh's Old Town. <u>It seemed only right to take their name</u>" (Witchery Tours, http://www.witcherytours.com/, emphasis added; cf. Mitchell 24).

Oberholtzer argues that reinventions of tradition are achieved by consciously "select[ing] and reinterpret[ing] symbols and imagery" associated with the traditions on which they are based (144). Certainly, Mercat's reinvention of this particular historically documented tradition has its basis in a romanticised and highly selective portrayal of the cadies, whom one contemporary observer describes as "Wretches, that in Rags lye upon the Stairs, and in the Streets at Night," and who often fulfilled the services of "a pimp, … or a bully" as well as those of a guide (Burt I: 23; Topham 87). The term cadie itself was later "[e]xtended to mean any ragamuffin or rough fellow," often used "contemptuously" (Grant II: 7). In contrast, the "cadie" who is represented within the Mercat Tours discourse has been literally reinvented as one of "the distinctive picturesque figures in the couthy, clarty [agreeable, dirty] old Edinburgh of Robert Fergusson's poems,"[10] those "living vehicles of news" who "did literally know everything … of Edinburgh" (Bone 119; Chambers 175-6). It is a sanitised and romanticised image promoted in local histories and guidebooks from the early nineteenth century onwards, once the cadies themselves had been safely consigned to the past.

Similarly, Mercat situates the cadies within an unspecifically "ancient" past which conveniently glosses over their relatively recent origins, further adding to the air of mystery and authenticity with which it surrounds its reinvented tradition. The company

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[10] The poetry of Robert Fergusson (1750-74) contains many vivid depictions of the social life of Edinburgh during the period. He writes about the cadies in his poem "Auld Reekie" (c.1773): "The usefu' Cadie plies in Street,/ To bide the Profits o' his Feet;/ For by thir Lads Auld Reekie's Fock [these; Edinburgh's folk]/ Ken but a Sample, o' the Stock [know]/ O' Thieves, that nightly wad oppress, [would]/ And maik baith Goods and Gear the less [both]" (ll.71-6, quoted in Mitchell 23).

also establishes an intimacy between its own audiences and those of the cadies by assuring them that they are instrumental in "keeping this tradition going," creating an impression of unbroken continuity which ignores the gap of almost two hundred years between the demise of the historical cadies and their subsequent resurrection within the Mercat Tours discourse (cf. Oberholtzer 143, 146-7).

Mercat's self-conscious reinvention of the "tradition of cadies," then, illustrates the way in which "what is new can take on symbolic value as 'traditional,'" exemplifying Richard Handler and Jocelyn Linnekin's definition of tradition as "a symbolic process that both presupposes past symbolisms and creatively reinterprets them," "attributing meaning in the present by making reference to the past" (273, emphasis added, 287). The company's creative reinterpretation of this particular historical tradition is achieved by means of what Charles Briggs calls "metadiscursive practices, that is, discursive practices that establish relationships with other discourses" (439). Specifically, Mercat's reinvention of the "tradition of cadies" can be interpreted as an instance of what Briggs calls "discourses of traditionalization," which establish intertextual links between "the present social world, as occupied by the speaker or writer and the audience, and a realm of the past, as peopled by elders, ancestors, and authentic bearers of tradition," thereby constructing their own "discursive authority" (449). Thus Mercat's metadiscursive appropriation of the "tradition of cadies," as a means of enhancing the symbolic value of its performances within a wider rhetoric of authenticity as originality, offers a valuable insight into the way in which participants in the (re)invention of tradition "construct modes of representing tradition and render them authoritative" (448).

## Authenticity as historical accuracy: "It's all the truth, nothing is made up"

A second, and particularly salient, conceptualisation of authenticity within the Mercat Tours discourse is that of <u>authenticity as historical accuracy</u>. This, indeed, is one of the most common meanings attributed to authenticity as it is constructed and presented in the heritage context. Gianna Moscardo and Philip Pearce, for example, write that the managers of the Australian historic theme parks which they studied are "very concerned with ... historical accuracy" and that "[t]his concern is often depicted as a concern for authenticity" (472). Similarly, in their work on living history, Richard Handler and William Saxton state that "[f]or living-history practitioners, 'authenticity' means historical accuracy or, in our terms, token isomorphism. An authentic piece of living history is one that <u>exactly</u> simulates or re-creates a <u>particular</u> place, scene, or event from the past" (243, emphases in original). The equation of authenticity with historical accuracy also corresponds to the second meaning of authenticity identified by Bruner in the case of New Salem: a meaning "based on genuineness," whereby an authentic representation is "one that is historically accurate and true" (399).

Commitment to historical accuracy lies at the crux of Mercat's ideology of authenticity. Its website reads that "our tours reveal the true ... history of this fascinating city. .... All of our stories have been carefully researched and we pride ourselves on our in-depth knowledge of Edinburgh's history" (Mercat Tours, http://www.mercat-tours.co.uk/). As marketing manager Gordon Stewart asserts: "The whole ethos of

Mercat Tours is to give a quality product that has historical accuracy"; "It's all the truth, nothing is made up" (quoted in Mathers 11). Similarly, during interviews I conducted with them, the company's employees repeatedly stress the centrality of "the history" to their performances, stating variously that "essentially it's the history that matters"; that "[w]e're there to tell you about what happened in Edinburgh's history"; and that "I would have to say that the history [is] the first and foremost, most important thing" (Brogan; McBrierty). The importance of historical accuracy is also continually emphasised to the company's guides throughout their training and in printed materials distributed internally by management: "Do not make stories up! We have a reputation for historical accuracy, which we would like to maintain!"; "Tour guides must be convinced of their facts and convincing in their telling" (McBrierty, "Storytelling" 1; "Additional" n.p.). Thus, according to Kathleen:

> all the tours … are historically accurate, that's one thing we guarantee. All the guides have to be history graduates, and all the material is authentic. …. [W]e are as specific and as authentic as we possibly can be. … [W]e consolidate all the resources we have, and make it as accurate as possible. …. [W]e try to reinforce the actual, accurate dates and specifics. (Brogan)[11]

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[11] A number of other ghost tour companies in the UK and beyond employ a similar rhetoric of authenticity as historical accuracy. The promotional materials of the Original Ghost Walk of York, for example, inform us that "the Walk aims to be accurate, authentic and genuine" (flier; http://www.yorkshirenet.co.uk/yorkghostwalk/). Similarly, Haunted Walks of Canada assures potential audience members that "[n]one of the stories on our tours have been made up or exaggerated and several years of research have gone into each tour. …. All of the research was done through Archives, old newspapers and most of all by actually interviewing and speaking to all of the people involved in the stories on the tour… You can rest assured that we have done our homework" (http://www.hauntedwalk.com/).

The status of the company's guides as "university trained historians," in particular, is repeatedly mentioned in its promotional materials, during interviews, and on the tours themselves. Tour guide Steve Humphreys, for example, tells me that "the big … selling point, … our 'thing,' if you like, with Mercat Tours is … the fact that we are all graduates of some sort, and it's run by ex-academics" (interview). Similarly, Kathleen informs the audience of one tour I attended: "we are all historians at Mercat Tours" (Brogan and Cameron). Significantly, despite the company's official insistence that they are all "university trained historians," not all of its guides have in fact studied history at university level. Tour guide Andrew Morris, for example, tells me that he was accepted for the job because of his previous experience as a tour guide in Edinburgh, despite the fact that the degree for which he is studying is in biology. He also mentions that of "a group of about ten of us" who took part in the company's training programme for the summer 2000 season, "we had three people who weren't historians: two biologists and an archaeologist" (interview). As with the Viking tourism sites studied by Chris Halewood and Kevin Hannam, then, the company's frequent "citing [of] academic expertise" functions as a rhetorical strategy designed to "authenticate [its] product" (575) and to reinforce its reputation for historical accuracy, despite the fact that closer scrutiny reveals its claims to such expertise to be exaggerated.

Mercat's continual emphasis on the historical accuracy of its tours and the academic expertise of its employees is of particular importance to the company since it provides it with a further means of distinguishing itself from Edinburgh's other walking tour companies. Its competitors are "pale imitations" which, according to Mercat's

rhetoric, are neither original nor accurate and are therefore doubly inauthentic.[12]

Interviewed for Glasgow-based newspaper The Herald, Mercat's director and cofounder,

Des Brogan, linked the company's inception to the poor quality of existing tours in

Edinburgh. He commented that: "When I heard the rubbish that was being spoken, it

struck me that I could do a better job" (Collier 24). Company employees I interviewed

similarly contrasted the factual accuracy of Mercat's account of Edinburgh's history with

those versions presented by the city's other ghost tour companies. According to general

manager Frances McBrierty, for example, "if you imagine … truth's in the middle of the

scale, then you've got complete lies at either side. There's maybe only a couple of

centimetres at either side of the truth that you can work within. Anything after that then

you become … like others. If you know what I mean!" (interview, emphasis in original).

Andrew, meanwhile, openly alleges that "[o]ther companies do [make things up],"

commenting that:

> I'd like to go on another [company's] tour, … because they … say,
> 'Where are you from?' then [I'd] say, 'Edinburgh. I'm a historian.' And
> they go, [jaw drops in horror], 'Ok, well, you know, this is more just for
> the tourists' sake.' And I think that's a bit wrong, I think people are then
> going out of there with a mis– ok, it's been great, they've enjoyed it, but at
> the end of the day, I think they come away from the tour I've done
> knowing a lot about the history and it is accurate. (Morris, interview,
> emphases in original)

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[12] Indeed, Mercat is generally acknowledged by the city's other ghost tour companies as "the historically accurate one" (Henderson, interview). When asked how he would respond to someone who found his own company's tours too "frivolous," for example, Witchery tour guide David Martin states: "I'd say…, 'Go to the [sic] Mercat Tours.' That's what they're for" (interview).

A parallel can be drawn here with Sharon Macdonald's work on the <u>Aros</u> heritage centre on the Isle of Skye in the Scottish Hebrides. As Macdonald explains: "A central aim of the exhibition [within the centre] … is 'to uncover the myths' that are told about Skye history. Myths in this context are not simply accounts told from different vantage points (as are stories) but are factually incorrect and get in the way of a version of history both more authentic and more meaningful… Myths are based on lies which should be revealed" (162). Richard Handler and Eric Gable describe a similar usage of the term <u>myths</u> by staff at the Colonial Williamsburg living history site in Virginia, where, they state, it is typically used to refer to the "many preconceptions and paradigms" held about the site's history by outsiders and which "museum staff members believe it is their duty to dispel" (97; cf. 76). It is this meaning of the term which Mercat's Gordon Stewart invokes in describing the "many, many myths" which have come to surround the stories told on Edinburgh's ghost tours. As he states: "it's the myths that we try to deconstruct and show the true story, back in its original form" (quoted in Mathers 15; see Figure 2.2).

Gordon's comments reveal a similar process of authentication within Mercat's discourse to that identified by Macdonald in the case of <u>Aros</u>. Macdonald writes that "the … creators of <u>Aros</u> are certainly not licensing a view that all accounts [of Skye history] are equally correct" and points out that despite its acknowledgement of the possibility of alternative accounts, the centre nonetheless "claims to be <u>the</u> Skye story, the story <u>of</u> Skye, and the story <u>from</u> the Skye point of view" (162, emphases in original). In a similar way, Mercat's claims to authenticity as historical accuracy operate in part through the construction of a dichotomy between the accuracy of the history presented on its own

Figure 2.2. "deconstructing the myths": an advertisement for Mercat's publication <u>Hidden & Haunted: Underground Edinburgh</u> on the company's advertising boards describes it as "the only book that tells the TRUE STORY, accurately and with authority."

tours and the practice of "making things up" allegedly indulged in by the city's other ghost tour companies. Thus, as Regina Bendix states: "identifying some cultural expressions or artifacts as authentic, genuine, trustworthy, or legitimate simultaneously implies that other manifestations are fake, spurious, and even illegitimate" (Search 9).

In the process of constructing a dichotomy between its own and other companies' tours, then, Mercat makes particular use of the fourth meaning of authenticity identified by Bruner at the New Salem site, that is, authenticity as "duly authorized, certified, or legally valid." As Bruner writes: "in this sense, the issue of authenticity merges into the notion of authority. The more fundamental question to ask here is not if an object or site is authentic, but rather who has the authority to authenticate, which is a matter of power – or, to put it another way, who has the right to tell the story of the site" (400). In this case, Mercat uses its rhetoric of authenticity as historical accuracy as a basis from which to claim exclusive authority to "deconstruct the myths" told on other companies' tours and to reveal to its own audiences "the true story back in its original form." The company's "power to create authoritative representations" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 62) in this context derives from the continuing pervasiveness of the "quest for authenticity" within contemporary touristic consciousness and the resultant privileging of the signs and symbols of authenticity with which Mercat legitimates and promotes its product.

Significantly, the company's rhetoric of authenticity as historical accuracy bears a marked similarity to the "just-the-facts" rhetoric identified by Handler and Gable in their work on the Colonial Williamsburg living history site. The authors describe how "'[v]eracity' or 'authenticity,' or getting the facts right, is an intrinsic value at Colonial

Williamsburg," to the extent that "in the daily workings of the museum, the constructionist view of history" to which the site's management purports to be committed "is largely overcome and obscured by a notion that history is a simple accounting of 'just the facts'" (48, 78). During the field research they conducted at the site, for example, they found that "despite the constructionist teachings of the social historians, the museum's staff members still talked as though they believed that history making is a value-free endeavor, a piecemeal and disinterested collection of 'just the facts'" (221). Indeed, they suggest that "[s]o dominant ... is the rhetoric of fact at Colonial Williamsburg that it is often difficult to raise the question of what the facts are being made to add up to – of what, that is, particular histories mean" (97).

A similar conception of history as consisting of "just the facts" underpins several of the statements made during interviews by Mercat's employees. Frances, for example, describes the "internal assessment scheme" used by the company's management to ensure that its guides maintain acceptable levels of accuracy on their tours: "mystery shoppers go along, who know what they should be saying..., know the facts. And if they're embellishing too much ... then we will find out and we'll say, 'Nope, sorry, that's wrong. Get back to the facts.'" She adds: "it can be slight things. Some people might put an embellishment in the story that they think is quite good, but is actually taking it too far away from the truth" (McBrierty, interview).[13]

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[13] We may compare Stephen Snow's observation that the management of the Plimoth Plantation living history site in Massachusetts "has included a constant critical surveillance as part of the performance process, so that any material that is discovered to be historically incorrect can be quickly removed" (209).

The dominance of this "just-the-facts" view of history within Mercat's discourse is especially apparent in employees' attempts to reconcile a commitment to historical accuracy with the highly selective, almost exclusively "dark" version of Edinburgh's past actually presented on their tours. By justifying their version of history on the basis that "they only use real stories,"[14] Mercat's employees often effectively ignore the question of which particular stories get told, and why. When questioned on this issue, Kathleen comments: "I think the fact that the stories we tell are true … makes them all the worse"; "I think it's all the more shocking when [audiences] do realise it is true, … that we're not fabricating it purely for shock factor" (Brogan, emphases added). Similarly, in a press statement given in July 1999, Gordon states: "We pride ourselves in the amount of gore and sewage in our stories, but we only use true revolting stories" (Fallis 11, emphasis added). Such comments reveal the way in which the "just-the-facts" rhetoric within the company's discourse operates (consciously or unconsciously) to "obscure the hand that shapes the representation" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 61), effectively concealing the processes of selectivity, interpretation and, occasionally, invention involved in shaping the history presented on its tours.[15]

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[14] Thus, for example, on the company's website we read that "[a]ll the stories are … completely authentic" and that "[t]he tales are all genuine" (Mercat Tours, http://www.mercat-tours.co.uk/).

[15] Similar comments are also made by employees of Edinburgh's other ghost tour companies. Aileen Bianconi, a guide with Mercat's affiliated company, Robin's Tours, states that: "You tell these horrible stories and people don't realise they're true. Or they can't believe that some of those dreadful things that happened to people a long time ago are true" (quoted in Kauppi 15, emphases in original). Similarly, Witchery tour manager Lorna Baxter comments that: "I think because the history is so juicy anyway, we're not

A parallel can be drawn here between Mercat's rhetoric of authenticity as historical accuracy and Elliott Oring's discussion of factuality and objectivity in the construction of "the news." In an article entitled "Legend, Truth, and News," Oring states that "[f]actuality and objectivity foster the illusion that the news is a transparent representation of events that enjoys a privileged relationship with reality." "This is an illusion," he explains, both because "the selection of what is to serve as news can neither be factual or objective" and because "the news is organized and communicated as 'stories,'" which "are coherent conceptual structures" (167). For Mercat's employees to base their claims to authenticity as historical accuracy on the fact that "they only use real stories" is to commit a basic category error, since, as Oring states, "Events make stories but stories conceptualize events" (170).

Significantly, like news, much of the history presented in the context of the contemporary tourism and heritage industries is also "organized and communicated as 'stories.'" In an article entitled "Authenticity in Heritage Interpretation," Stuart Hannabuss explores what he calls "the story aspects of the heritage experience" and argues that "a sense of story" is a key factor by which that experience is made to appear authentic or "really real" to its consumers (353, 359). Hannabuss uses the term "storying" to describe a form of communication which involves "not just 'telling stories' but representing and sharing meanings and explanations in story," arguing that this practice "represents a unique and intuitive form in heritage interpretation" (361).

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having to lay it on too thick. It is pretty much as it happens. .... [W]e don't have to embellish things, they're pretty gory and awful as they are" (interview, emphasis added).

Macdonald, meanwhile, describes how its makers "repeatedly [refer] to <u>Aros</u> as a 'story,'" quoting as examples comments made by the centre's manager – "'we tried to tell a story which...,' 'we tell the story and let them make up their own minds'" – and noting that the title of the centre's exhibition itself is "<u>The Skye Story</u>" (161). Similarly, Handler and Gable write that the "new social history" introduced from the 1970s at Colonial Williamsburg "was a story, and explicitly a story, designed to replace past versions of 'the Williamsburg story' that the museum had told its audience" (61).

Handler and Saxton, meanwhile, write that "an outstanding feature of the historical worlds created by living history is that they have <u>narrative coherence</u>; that is, they are <u>emplotted</u> or constituted as stories" (243, emphases in original). The authors identify a number of "complex ties to narrative" within the discourses of living history practitioners, describing, for example, how "living historians rely heavily on narrative ... history ... in [their] research"; how "they often supply narrative accounts in the course of their reenactments"; how individual reenactors produce retrospective "narrative accounts ... of momentous reenactments"; and how, most significantly, reenactments themselves "are envisioned and structured to be complete, readable stories (or chapters thereof)" (251-2). These "complex ties to narrative," they argue, are symptomatic of a basic attraction on the part of living history practitioners to "the satisfying configurational unity that a good plot provides," to the power of narrative to "[construct], out of a vast domain of data, ... a coherent account of what 'really' transpired" (251, 250).

Similarly "complex ties to narrative" can be identified within the discourse of Mercat Tours. The company's performances are structured as a series of narratives

explicitly framed as "stories."[16] Trainee guides receive coaching in "storytelling skills" –
how to "pick out the important bits of a story" and tell it "with flair, drama and
atmosphere" – and are given advice on how to "link each story with the next" in order to
give a tour "good flow and structure" (McBrierty, interview; "Storytelling" 1-2). Indeed,
so significant is "a sense of story" (Hannabuss 359) to the way in which its employees
think about the history presented on their tours that it gives rise to an important extended
metaphor which surfaces repeatedly throughout the company's discourse: that of history
as story (cf. Macdonald 160-2; Handler and Gable 59-61). This metaphor is encapsulated
in a remark made by Des Brogan during his interview for The Herald quoted above, in
which he proclaims: "History is usually a damned good story. It just needs damned good
telling" (Collier 24). This statement was later repeated to me almost verbatim by
Frances, who described it as "the ethos for the company." This ethos, she explains, was
originally "established" by the company's cofounders and, since its founding in 1985, has
been consistently "instilled" or "indoctrinated" into everyone it employs (McBrierty,
interview).

Significantly, however, Frances's explanation of what it means for the company
to describe history as "a damned good story" which "needs damned good telling" reveals
a very different view of history from that of the "just-the-facts" rhetoric encoded in its
ideology of authenticity as historical accuracy. Linking the characterisation of history as

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[16] This is signalled, for example, by opening and closing remarks made by guides
during their performances: "our first story of the evening..."; "like all good stories, it
concerns..."; "True story – honestly, I kid you not"; "We've come to the end of the
storytelling for this evening"; and so on (Humphreys, tour; Brogan and Cameron; Morris,
tour).

story within the company's discourse to another widespread trope of heritage

interpretation, she explains:

> [it means] we want to <u>bring history to life</u> for people. We don't want a
> dry, boring lecture. We want people to be enthused by what happened, we
> want people to feel about what happened, we want to draw them into
> Edinburgh's past. We want them to be scared, we want them to be
> interested, we want them to think. …. [I]t's always good to make people
> think about it. Think about possibilities, think about what might have
> happened, come up with their own ideas… (McBrierty, interview,
> emphasis added)

As Frances suggests, then, for Mercat Tours, "bringing history to life" involves bringing

it to life not literally, as in the reenactments of living history, but rather, as tour guide Iain

Cameron puts it, "in people's imaginations," by encouraging the active emotional and

imaginative engagement of each individual audience member with the past. As Iain

explains: "You've got to show them the door into the past and then from there they can

take it for themselves" (interview).

The characterisation of history as story within the company's discourse thus

implicitly contradicts its commitment to authenticity as historical accuracy, since it

suggests that stories have the power to bring history to life in a way that "the facts" alone

cannot. As Caroline Mathers writes in her study of Mercat and Witchery Tours, both

companies "give people an insight into the history of the city of Edinburgh in a fun and

entertaining way. Ultimately however it is <u>the stories</u> that capture the imaginations of

visitors to the city" (17, emphasis added). Thus Aileen Bianconi, a guide with Mercat's

affiliated company, Robin's Tours, comments that most people find it "very confusing"

and "boring" "if you throw too many dates at them." In contrast, the role of the ghost

tour guide is "to tell stories," so that although "[i]t's all fact, … it makes it fun" (quoted

in Kauppi 11).[17] Sigrid Schmidt makes a similar point in her study of stories told by tour guides in Hildesheim, Germany, when she states that "[a] very important aspect of tourist guides' stories is that they appeal to the emotions." As she writes:

> the ultimate purpose of these little tales is to form a bridge from the object of art or history to the heart of the visitor. The information about figures and facts often is not sufficient to make an object 'speak' to the visitor... The little tale has to move him in some way. If it does, the tale will remain in the memory of the visitor even when most of the general information has been forgotten. (186)

The characterisation of history as story within the Mercat Tours discourse thus constitutes an implicit privileging of what Mike Crang, in his work on living history, calls "'emotive' and 'affinitive' knowledge" (422), an alternative "way of knowing" which stands in marked contrast to the company's official rhetoric of authenticity as historical accuracy or "just the facts."[18] In a similar way, Handler and Saxton describe how "[living historians] speak frequently of 'holistic' historic experience" and consider knowledge derived from such experience to be "at least complementary to that based on 'purely intellectual effort,' and at best superior to it" (248). As a result, the authors write, "the quest for authentic experience" is often "coupled with an explicit rejection of written, narrative history as a privileged gateway to such experiences." This is

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[17] Similarly, Auld Reekie tour guide Gavin Bolus states that "most people like to hear stories. And even if they want to hear facts..., the facts are probably more interesting and absorbable if given in story form" (interview).

[18] In his work on living history reenactments, Crang writes that this "empathetic approach is crucial to understanding how living history works," as well as "the way in which the past is enjoyed" by its practitioners, who typically experience "an emotional and empathetic bond with what is depicted" (422). We may compare Jay Anderson's concept of "felt-truth," also referring to living history, which "challenges us to think and feel .... [and] forces us to experience the past as fully as possible" (191).

illustrated, for example, by Frances's assertion that Mercat's characterisation of history as story signifies in part that "[w]e don't want a dry, boring lecture." As she explains, an effective ghost tour performance involves "drawing people into [the past], rather than just saying, 'This happened, this happened, this happened'" (McBrierty, interview). Merely recounting a list of historically accurate "facts," then, is not enough; indeed, Mercat's employees often explicitly reject this as a model for their own performances.

The distinction between the two conceptualisations of history encoded in Mercat's rhetoric of authenticity as historical accuracy or "just the facts," on the one hand, and its characterisation of history as story, on the other, corresponds to the distinction drawn by Tom Selwyn between "authenticity as knowledge," or "cool" authenticity, and "authenticity as feeling," or "hot" authenticity (quoted in Wang 48). Just as Marc Kuly notes of Fort Garry, Mercat's stated commitment to authenticity as historical accuracy is, or purports to be, "guided by curatorial ideals of perfection and attention to the historical record." In contrast, its characterisation of history as story is more openly informed "by an impressionistic sense of what 'feels' right and the attempt to evoke feelings about the past" (n.p.). Significantly, however, several examples can be identified within the company's discourse wherein employees nonetheless attempt to conflate these two distinct types of authenticity. Des, for example, expresses a belief that the popularity of the company's tours can be attributed "to the fact that we use good people <u>to accurately recount the past</u> and <u>to bring it alive</u>," implying that these two aims coexist unproblematically as part and parcel of the same authenticating project (Collier 24, emphases added). A similar conflation takes place when employees justify their claims

to authenticity as historical accuracy on the basis that "they only use real stories," as we saw above.

As Wang argues, however, "it would be wrong to suggest that the emotional experience of the 'real' self ('hot authenticity') necessarily entails, coincides with, or results from the epistemological experience of a 'real' world out there ('cool authenticity'), as if the latter were the sole cause of the former" (48, emphases in original). In fact, then, it can be argued that "accurately recounting the past" and "bringing it alive" constitute very different values within the Mercat Tours discourse, which, though they coexist for the most part relatively harmoniously, do at times result in considerable tensions and incongruities. As Iain points out, for example, the project of bringing history to life "in people's imaginations" means that each individual audience member's "version of [the past] is going to be completely different to every other" (Cameron) – an acknowledgement which it is difficult to reconcile with the company's official rhetoric of authenticity as historical accuracy or "just the facts."

The importance attributed to "'emotive' and 'affinitive' knowledge" within the Mercat Tours discourse thus accords with observations made by Macdonald and by Handler and Gable regarding the significance of the characterisation of history as story as a representational strategy in the heritage context. Macdonald, for example, suggests that the characterisation of history as story is indicative of a recognition by the makers of Aros that their product represents "a particular version of history, told from a particular 'point of view'"; that "[i]t is ... only a very small part of what might potentially be told"; and that it "is significantly different from many other accounts of Skye history." It also

"clearly leaves space ... for alternative accounts of history" (161, emphasis in original).

Thus, she argues, it is part of a "vision of history as having alternatives, and as only ever

being partially represented ... from particular perspectives," a vision which "is very

different from the crude opposition of 'true history' versus 'bogus history' ... used by

[Robert] Hewison in his critique of the heritage industry" (Macdonald 161-2; cf.

Hewison, Heritage 144). It also differs markedly from the "just-the-facts" rhetoric within

the Mercat Tours discourse. Similarly, Handler and Gable suggest that the

characterisation of history as story within the discourse of Colonial Williamsburg

represents one manifestation of a "constructionist theory" of history – part of what they

call the "new social history" – which was introduced into the museum's discourse from

the 1970s. According to this constructionist theory, the authors write, "History ... is a

story with a moral, with a meaning that cannot be adduced from the facts alone." Thus, it

is the choices "to tell particular stories about a potentially infinite past" which "account

for the changing of history" at the site, rather than "the steady discovery and organization

of facts" (59-61).

This view of history as "more than the sum of the available facts" (Handler and

Gable 61) is expressed in a number of other ways within the Mercat Tours discourse. It

is clearly illustrated, for example, in Steve's description of his attitude towards those he

refers to as academic "detractors" of the history presented on the company's tours:

> There's one thing I really hate, and I know a couple of people who at best
> could be called academic snobs. Because ... [they're] like, 'Oh, the way
> you're treating our history, ... you're telling these people rubbish.' But I
> [think], 'Well, we're not really, because the thing is, who are you to say
> what is the history? Ok, you're trying to lay ownership,' but of course, ...
> history ... can be seen in various perspectives. .... [I]t always has

> changed, it always will change, and that's it. But it doesn't make it less valid… [I]t's someone's perspective, it always is. (Humphreys, interview, emphasis in original)

Steve's conceptualisation of history is sophisticated. Here he acknowledges both history as an interpretive construct and the cultural and political significance of "what particular histories mean." It is a view which sits uneasily alongside Mercat's official rhetoric of authenticity as historical accuracy or "just the facts." This tension is evidenced, in particular, in Steve's perception of history as always mediated through "various perspectives" and in his condemnation of attempts by academic historians to "lay ownership" or claim the exclusive right to define "what is the history."[19] The irony here is that the practices which Steve condemns in these academic "detractors" are directly comparable to those used by Mercat itself in constructing its own performances as the only authentic ghost tour experience in the city.

Significantly, the training process undergone by guides employed by Mercat, like those of other Edinburgh ghost tour companies, encodes a similar view of history as consisting of "more than the sum of the available facts." This process clearly illustrates the social model of knowledge construction described by Handler and Gable in their work on Colonial Williamsburg. The authors found that, ironically, "the resort to

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[19] The "thorny relationship" between "the academic community and the developing heritage industry" (Loveday 73, 69) has recently begun to attract comment from scholars. Crang, for example, writes that the "intense hostility" of academics towards living history "overlooks the self-reflexivity of the reenactors and invokes the superiority of a rational understanding of the past." He adds that "[o]ne must also question the dichotomization of education and entertainment implied [in academia's 'dismissal of all "emotive" and "affinitive" knowledge'] and to what extent academia is an interested party in maintaining one side of the dichotomy as legitimate knowledge and cultural capital" (422).

documented facts" on the part of interpreters working at the site "was frequently a matter of oral tradition." They explain that "[a]s a rule, frontline employees accepted – and used in their interpretations – facts on the say-so of colleagues or superiors who told them that such-and-such a tidbit of information was documented"; in addition, they took "many of their facts from snippets of documents in their training manuals, supplemented by reading … they did on their own." Thus, they argue, there is a striking "disjunction between the social construction of knowledge, through multiplex and ongoing conversations, on the one hand, and, on the other, the natives' model of what they claim to be doing, which privileges 'documented facts' to the exclusion of all other sources of information" (90, emphasis in original).[20]

In a similar way, when commenting on how they learn the history presented on their tours, guides employed by Mercat and other companies consistently emphasise the inadequacy of learning entirely from written sources and, conversely, the importance of interactivity and "oral tradition" (cf. Kauppi 12). As Witchery's Lorna Baxter comments, for example:

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[20] Comparable processes of knowledge construction among interpreters are described by scholars of other contemporary heritage sites. Bruner, for example, states that the interpreters at New Salem "have received the official messages of the site, primarily in training sessions and in manuals, but they frequently depart from the official scripts and move off in their own directions" (410). Similarly, in detailing "the way in which interpreters interact with each other in an attempt to gain proficiency at performing their characters and interpreting the past" at Lower Fort Garry, Kuly describes how "part of interpreters' messages and the manner of delivering them … is based on the informal knowledge network existing amongst interpreters at the site." In particular, he states that "[m]ore than any other source of historical information or training in interpretation employees … rely on observing each others' performances" (n.p.).

> Most of the stories that are told on the tour now have been passed down ... from one guide to the next. One guide's brought his own little thing to it and the other guides have picked up on that. So they've kind of grown rather than being scripted.... I think there's been a lot of input from various people to a story you would maybe have heard last night. (interview)

Significantly, the learning process described here by Lorna bears a striking similarity to the traditional folkloric model of oral transmission. The stories are "passed down" by word of mouth from guide to guide, each adding "his own little thing" while also "picking up on" elements contributed by earlier links in the chain. There is no fixed text or "script." Instead, the stories told on the tours have "grown" through an organic process incorporating both continuity and innovation, so that the form assumed by each story at any given time represents the combined product of "a lot of input from various people" – a classic expression of the folkloric concept of collective authorship.

Significantly, despite the company's official rhetoric of authenticity as historical accuracy, this "folkloric" model of knowledge construction among guides, particularly the features of an absence of scriptedness and the significance attributed to oral transmission, is also repeatedly described by employees of Mercat Tours itself. Frances, for example, states that:

> If [new guides] do pick up a script of sorts, they'll pick it up from listening to other guides. So I suppose you could call [it] an oral script, if you like. But ... in the guide handbook, which is given to all the new guides, the stories that are written down there are so small that they would take less than a minute to tell.... [T]here's not enough in there to make that a presentation. They'll get the facts..., they'll get the synopsis of the story from that, but they won't get the little embellishments – the little flowery bits. And they get that from going on [tours] with other guides. (McBrierty, interview)

In contrast to Mercat's stated commitment to historical accuracy, then, Frances' depiction of the learning process undertaken by trainee guides stresses that "the facts" alone are "not enough" to constitute an effective ghost tour performance. These facts must be supplemented by the "embellishments" or "flowery bits" which can only be learned by attending tours led by more experienced guides. As Iain comments: "you're given the outline of the story, … with all the key dates and stuff. But every tour guide is expected to pick up their own way of telling it" (Cameron).

Attending tours led by more experienced guides, initially merely to observe and later to participate to varying degrees, is thus a central part of the training process undertaken by guides working for Mercat and most other Edinburgh ghost tour companies. Andrew, for example, describes how partway through Mercat's training programme (which at six weeks' duration is the most intensive of any of the tour companies' I studied), trainees begin to attend tours conducted by existing guides, at first performing one or two stories as part of each tour and then gradually working up to conducting "half tours with the other guides." As he explains:

> you're … in your black cape [the same] as the official, the full-time guide…. So you start with two stories…, you walk around … at the edge of the group. You're learning more. And that's good because you start to get your confidence. You do one story that you've practised over and over again. …. And then basically you just work it up, do more and more stories, do a half tour with a full guide. …. [T]hat is really good training. You've got somebody there to say, … as you're walking along, … 'That was good,' or, 'Try doing this next time,' or, 'The people at the back couldn't quite hear you'… So you learn on the job, basically. (Morris, interview)

Trainees not only gain confidence and presentational skills by attending and participating in tours led by experienced guides; they also "pick up on" the distinctive styles which

characterise these individual guides' performances. As David Pollock of City of the
Dead describes: "you go and join the tours and see what all the other guides are doing,
and see what style you might like to adopt yourself" (interview). As a result of this
process, for example, Iain comments that "Ailsa [an experienced Mercat guide] was
saying … that she could see from a few [new guides] that they've got her patter. And
I've got Kathleen's patter, I've got a good deal of her bits and pieces." As he explains:
"that just happens because you're learning how they tell the story" (Cameron).

Several guides also comment on the fact that while, to begin with, trainees'
performance styles typically consist of a synthesis of stylistic elements borrowed, as it
were, from all those guides whose tours they have attended as part of their training,
eventually each will develop her own unique style. According to Kathleen, for example,
trainee guides "pick up different pieces of different people's tours and then put their own
edge to that, and that's their tour" (Brogan). Similarly, Frances, who is responsible for
training Mercat's guides, describes how "when you start doing tours, your style is an
amalgam of every guide that you've ever seen doing a tour," but how "[a] couple of
months into it you're beginning to develop your own style" (McBrierty, interview).[21]
Thus, while guides learn basic facts from reading the synopses of the stories contained in
their guide handbooks or from consulting other written sources, confidence,
presentational skills and performance style are all learned "on the job" by means of what

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[21] In a similar way, Cameron Pirie, who is involved in training new guides at
Witchery Tours, comments that "after a … couple of weeks … [trainee guides] start to
put their own things in," so that each guide "eventually [does] it in a way which is unique
to them" (interview).

Handler and Gable call "the social construction of knowledge." The significance attributed by guides to these latter skills as indicators of communicative competence over and above factual knowledge in this particular work culture clearly indicates a perception of history as "more than the sum of the available facts." This perception contrasts starkly with Mercat's official rhetoric of authenticity as historical accuracy, highlighting instead the importance of performance to the success of the company's tours.

## Authenticity as performance: "tricks and gimmicks" vs. "damned good telling"

A third and final conceptualisation of authenticity within the Mercat Tours discourse is what I will call <u>authenticity as performance</u>. This has to do not with the content of the company's tours itself but rather with the manner in which that content is presented to its audiences. A helpful way to begin to explore this last meaning of authenticity is to consider emic conceptualisations of what makes an <u>in</u>authentic ghost tour performance. In a newspaper review of ghost tours in York, England, journalist Peter Elson states that "[t]he tours divide into two types – straight ones relying on ghost stories, and theatrical walks with 'jump-outs' involving fake ghouls and props" (n.p.). Elson's distinction between these two types of tour points to opposing performance aesthetics within the overall ghost tour context, an opposition which will be explored in depth in the remainder of this chapter and the one which follows. As we might expect, tour companies such as Mercat which exhibit high levels of concern for authenticity

typically fall within the first of Elson's categories and themselves tend to make much of this distinction as a means of authenticating their own performances.

Within the discourses of "straight" ghost tour companies such as Mercat, there are a number of characteristics which mark other companies' performances as inauthentic. Notable among these are performance techniques such as the adoption of theatrical personae by guides; the employment of characters known as "jumper-outers" to accost the audience at strategic points during a tour; the use of "props" such as plastic rats and replica torture implements; and the use of technology such as sound and light effects in order to simulate supernatural encounters. The deception, fabrication and fakery which most straight ghost tour companies perceive to be inherent in such practices are encoded in the very terms – "tricks," "gimmicks" and "special effects" – which they use to refer to them and which are explicitly contrasted with the claims to "truth," "realness" and "genuineness" which such companies use to authenticate their own performances. The promotional materials of the Original Ghost Walk of York, for example, proudly state that "[w]e do not need to stage manage tricks or gimmicks" (flier; http://www.yorkshirenet.co.uk/yorkghostwalk/), while those of the Haunted Walk of York include the following disclaimer: "No masks or gimmicks: Traditional storytelling at its best" (flier; advertising board).[22] Dale Jarvis of the St. John's Haunted Hike in Newfoundland, meanwhile, stresses that "all along, part of my marketing ... has been that what I do is true. That I do not make up these stories, these are not things that I've

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[22] We may compare the similarly pejorative use of the term "gimmicks" by one of Macdonald's informants, in whose terms, she writes, it signifies "inauthentic" (172).

created, people aren't jumping out at you and scaring you, it's not that sort of thing. It's

not a haunted house, where the whole thing is fabricated" (interview, 19 Feb 2000).

Similarly, a flier for New Orleans-based Haunted History Tours states: "This is not a

Halloween spook house – this is real."[23]

Mercat, too, repeatedly assures its audiences that "no gimmicks and no special

effects are used" on its tours (advertising board; see Figure 2.3). During one tour I

attended, immediately after the tour party's arrival in the underground vaults, our guide,

Kathleen, gives her audience "a guarantee, that whilst we're down here we don't have

any fancy slide projectors, we don't have any hidden sound equipment. We certainly

don't have any [disdainfully] 'jumper-ooters.' Therefore anything you should hear, feel

or see is most definitely genuine" (Brogan and Cameron). Steve, meanwhile, provides a

veritable checklist of features which he regards as signalling a lack of authenticity in the

context of the ghost tour performance. Included in his list are the use of characters who

"wear rubber masks, jump out and go, 'Boo!'"; of special effects such as "electronic

trickery … and holographic ghosts"; and of props such as "a skeleton on a pulley" and

"papier maché replicas of torture implements." Of Mercat Tours, he comments: "we

make no claims that we're going to do anything like that. We do actively discourage

people to [sic] think, 'Ok, somebody's going to jump out and go, "Boo!"' and … things

like that… They know that's not what they're going to get from our [tours]"

(Humphreys, interview). As such statements indicate, employees of Mercat and other

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[23] The phenomenon of the "haunted house" or "Halloween spook house" has received attention in recent articles by Sabina Macliocco and by Sylvia Grider and is discussed further in Chapter Three.
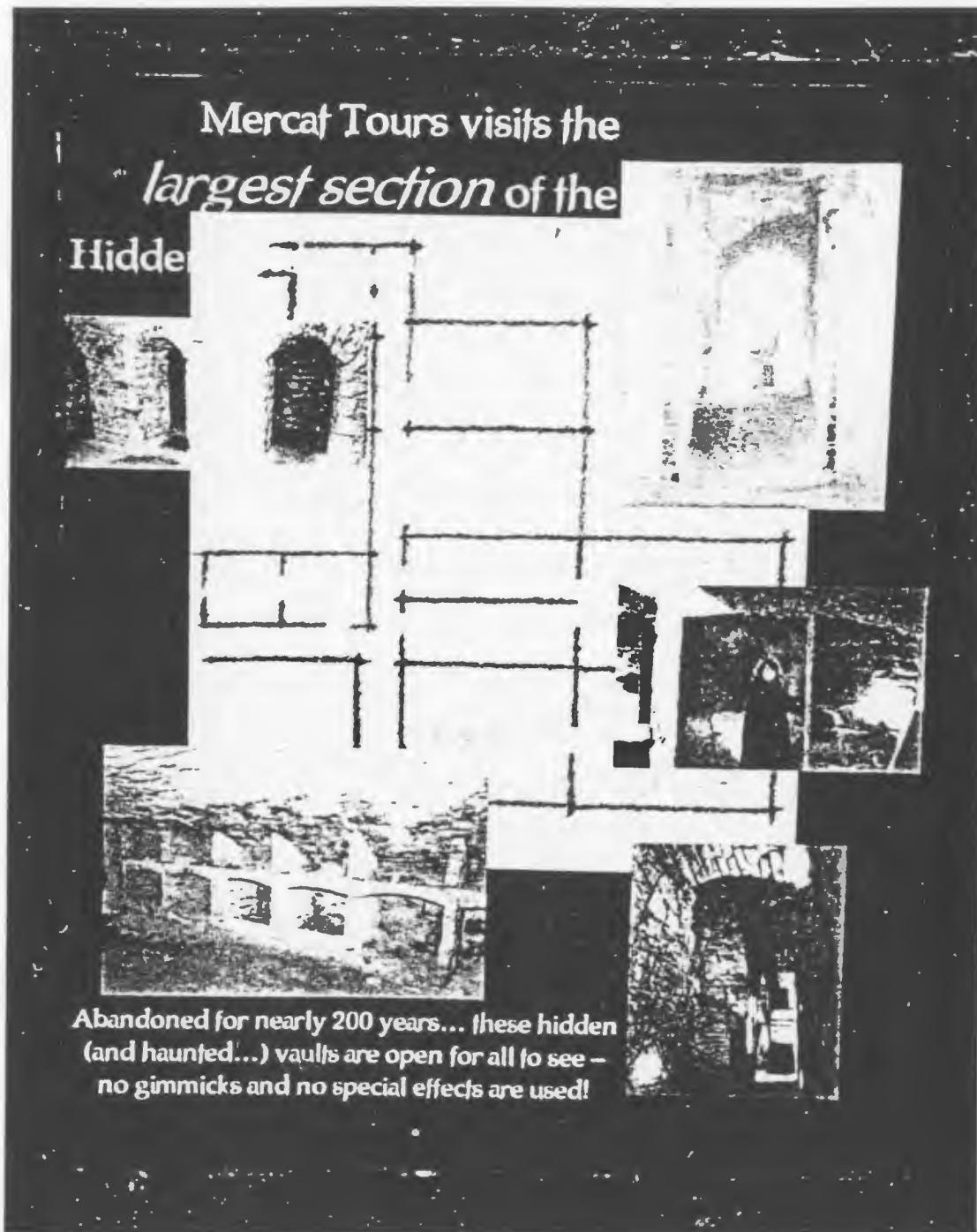
Figure 2.3. "no gimmicks and no special effects": an advertisement for Mercat's tours of the Hidden Underground Vaults.

straight ghost tour companies typically "feel that use of ... 'jumper ooters'" and other

such techniques "compromises the tone, effect and integrity of the tour" and "appear to

believe that authenticity is at risk if too much drama is involved" (Inglis and Holmes 58,

quoting personal communication with Mercat Tours).

The adoption of theatrical personae by guides is regarded by employees of Mercat

and other straight ghost tour companies as a particularly clear indication of a lack of

authenticity. In his work on the Plimoth Plantation living history site in Massachusetts,

Stephen Snow found similar "fears concerning the actor identity" among interpreters at

this site. Snow describes how "the question of theatrical identity is frequently and

heatedly debated among the members of the interpretation staff" at Plimoth Plantation,

"some of whom can argue forcefully for either side." Significantly, he states that "the

most serious criticism of identifying first-person interpretation with acting" among

employees at the site is the perception that "to be acting is to be faking, i.e., to be re-

creating history based on misinformation" (132-3).[24] The association of acting with

fakery and misinformation accounts in large part for the "antitheatrical prejudice" (Snow

133) of most straight ghost tour companies, committed as they are to the presentation of

an authentic, historically accurate portrayal of the past. As a result, employees of such

companies frequently draw particularly strong contrasts between the fakery which they

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[24] Similarly, Richard Schechner states that the perception of theatre as "behavior that is 'put on' ... is what gives theater its bad name. Theater is the art where the master teacher says, 'Truth is what acting is all about; once you can fake truth, you've got it made'" (quoted in Snow 135). Bendix describes, from the sixteenth century onwards, a widespread suspicion of theatre as "the domain that is constructed out of pretense and artifice, and hence 'insincerity'" (Search 16).

perceive to be inherent in the adoption of the actor identity and the comparative

authenticity of their own performance techniques. Thus, on a tour operated in Edinburgh

by Auld Reekie, our guide, Damien, states that "I don't believe, personally, in dressing

up on these tours, and makeup and big capes and things and going 'Boo!', because I

believe the real stuff is far more horrible than anything you can possibly invent"

(Damien, tour).[25] Similarly, the operators of Ghost Tours of Niagara in Ontario state that

theirs "is not the kind of ghost tour where actors portray the ghosts or people jump out

and try to scare you. We tell the real stories of people's real experiences with real spirits.

…. We're talking real ghosts here, this is not a haunted house ride" (http://www.ghrs.org/

ghosttours/).

Mercat's employees point to two further problems with the actor identity as it

manifests itself in the ghost tour context, both of which also relate specifically to the

issue of authenticity. Firstly, the adoption of theatrical personae is seen to limit guides'

freedom to express their own personalities as part of their performances. Kathleen

comments, for example, that Mercat prefers "to rely upon the personality of the guide"

than have its employees conduct their tours "in character" (Brogan). As Frances states:

"most of our guides are characters in themselves. Ok, they're not Mrs McTavish who

used to live on the Royal Mile or anything, but most of the people who come on the tours

know that, anyway" (McBrierty, interview). Similarly, Iain feels that "one very strong

thing about Mercat is [that] they do really expect you, … they really push you and help

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[25] Ironically, however, a jumper-outer did in fact feature at the culmination of this particular tour.

you, [to] personalise every aspect of [the tours]. Because only if you're making it personal are you actually enjoying it. And once you're enjoying it you're halfway ... to making an audience enjoy it." He adds: "I think it's much better" that the company's guides do not adopt theatrical personae in which to conduct their tours, because it means that "you're not hammering people into boxes, you're letting them do it as they wish to do it. Instead of trying to tell them, 'Well, now, this is how you play this'" (Cameron). Andrew, meanwhile, states that when he first started working for Mercat, "I tried to be a kind of persona ... and I thought, 'This isn't going to work, because it's not me, it's not my natural character coming through.' I thought my character would come through better if I did it my own way" (Morris, interview). Implicit in such comments is a value-laden dichotomy between two meanings of the word character: as individual personality and as theatrical persona. The first carries overtones of honesty and genuineness (as in the expression of guides' "natural characters") while the other implies imposture and deception.[26]

Secondly, the adoption of the actor identity is seen to limit potential for developing an authentic relationship between performer and audience. This is what Wang calls "inter-personal authenticity" (68-70). Frances, for example, suggests that the

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[26] Several guides further distance themselves from the actor identity by stressing their own lack of formal theatrical training or experience. Iain, for example, states that "I know some guides with other companies that have the whole sort of 'actor' thing, the thespian, jumping up and down, and just having a little mini-production for people. ... I couldn't do that, because I've not got the training to do that, so I wouldn't know how to start" (Cameron). Similarly, Auld Reekie tour guide David Swift comments that "I've got no theatrical training whatsoever," "I was a history student rather than an actor" (interview).

adoption of theatrical personae by guides is patronising and insulting to audience

members' intelligence, since most are fully aware that their guide is not "Mrs McTavish

who used to live on the Royal Mile" (McBrierty, interview).  Similarly, Auld Reekie tour

guide David Swift suspects that were he to conduct his tours in character, "I'd do it in a

very theatrical style and I'd get very aloof" and "a lot more slick [sic] with the tour

party," so that they "couldn't ask me questions and there['d be] no interaction on the

tour."  He adds: "I think [audiences] respond better having an actual person" as their

guide, rather than a theatrical character (interview).  Iain, too, feels that conducting tours

as oneself positively affects the guide's ability to "relate to" his audiences, since "they're

not standing and watching a passive thing [sic], they're actually … getting involved"

(Cameron).[27]  Conducting tours as oneself is also seen to enable guides to adapt their

performance styles and even the content of their tours to suit the needs of each individual

audience.  As Frances explains:

> the guide reacts to the audience all the time.  And I know that happens to a
> certain extent on stage, but you do have a script, usually, to follow on
> stage; the guide doesn't have that.  So they can react and they can produce
> whatever they want for this audience; they can change the stories, they can
> do a completely different set of stories if they want to.  (McBrierty,
> interview)

Employees of Mercat and other straight ghost tour companies express a particular

aversion towards the use of so-called "jumper-outers," whom they regard as an ultimate

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[27] Snow similarly identifies the interaction which takes place between interpreters
and audience as one of the "major differences" distinguishing the living history
performances at Plimoth Plantation from those which typically take place in theatre (e.g.,
43, 146).  Thus, for example, according to one Plimoth interpreter, the fact that he wasn't
"acting" meant that "I had a chance to speak to the audience, to come down off the stage,
if you will, and talk more personally with the visitors" (134).

manifestation of the fakery inherent in assuming the actor identity. This perception can

be attributed to the fact that the role of the jumper-outer consists of "pure" gimmick:

entertainment for its own sake in the absence of any redeeming educational or

informational content. Thus the operators of Haunted Walks of Canada, for example,

offer the assurance that no one will "jump out of the bushes or startle [you] on the tour"

(as is the practice "on some other tours"), explaining that:

> We prefer to get you involved in the stories through the atmosphere we
> present, and to give you enough evidence and proof of each haunting that
> you will have plenty to think about when you get home to your bed. We
> don't need to surprise you or physically scare you to make you remember
> your time on the Haunted Walk! (http://www.hauntedwalk.com/)

Similarly, in an article published in Haunted Attraction Magazine, Dale Jarvis writes that

"[t]he St. John's Haunted Hike has resisted the temptation to have actors in ghoulish

costumes bursting out at key moments during the tour, preferring to keep the stories

themselves central to the production" ("Notes" 10).

In the case of Mercat Tours, Frances sees the use of jumper-outers as "detracting

from the actual stories that we're telling" and wonders how "a group who're really

interested in the history … would … feel if every now and again they were accosted by

something in a rubber mask" (McBrierty, interview).[28] Similarly, Gordon states that

"[w]e try and bring these stories back to life so that people don't need someone dressed

up jumping out, because the stories work in their own right" (Stewart, quoted in Mathers

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[28] Mercat and Robin's Tours are the only Edinburgh-based ghost tour companies
which do not feature jumper-outers on any of their tours.

11). Steve, meanwhile, summarises his attitude towards the use of jumper-outers as

follows:

> I mean, … you could say, 'Oh well, this is a story about Blah-blah-blah-
> blah, he lived round this corner,' and as we go round this corner somebody
> jumps out and goes, 'Boo!' And basically it's that person jumping out
> with the rubber mask going, 'Boo!' which has actually made the thing,
> rather than the story itself; the story becomes secondary. I mean, what['s]
> the point [in] that? (Humphreys, interview)

Thus Steve believes that rather than "trying to bring … these ghosts back to life" through

the use of jumper-outers and other tricks and gimmicks, the role of the ghost tour guide is

to "get the imagination engaged into a story" by focusing attention instead on "what you

can actually tell." As he states: "if you're telling stories very, very well, you don't need

supplementary stimul[i]" such as characters, props and special effects in order to present

an effective ghost tour performance (interview).

As such statements reveal, the discourses of Mercat and other straight ghost tour

companies construct authenticity not through theatrical performance techniques but rather

through "the actual stories that we're telling" (McBrierty, interview) Narrative content or

substance is valued over performance style. The central tenet of Mercat's performance

aesthetic – that it is the stories themselves which "make" the tour – is informed by a

fundamental logocentrism which underpins the entire ideology of authenticity within the

company's discourse and which is encapsulated in Steve's comment that "it's … like

they say…, 'the picture's always better in the radio.'"

According to this aesthetic, authenticity as performance lies in the guide's ability

to "bring these stories back to life" using only what Frances calls "the power of word to

create the atmosphere," effectively obscuring her own instrumentality by allowing the

stories to "work in their own right" (McBrierty, interview; Stewart, quoted in Mathers 11). Rather than making use of theatrical techniques which are seen to draw attention to the tours' status as entertainment and thus to detract from their "true" and "genuine" content, the aim of the straight ghost tour guide is to engage tour participants' imaginations so completely with each story that their awareness of the performance frame is entirely suppressed. In this way, the guide creates the belief that the audience is experiencing "the real thing": gaining a direct and authentic insight into the city's past. Like Mercat's employees' insistence that "they only use real stories," then, such rhetoric works to "obscure the hand that shapes the representation" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 61), presenting the illusion of a transparent, unmediated portrayal of the past which is achieved, ironically, by effacing the very means of its own production: the artifice of the guide herself. As Inglis and Holmes observe, while "[i]t is recognized that the guide is giving a 'performance,' the quality of which is key in the tour as entertainment," "Still some tour operators are keen to give the impression that the past speaks for itself. It is 'the vivid detail of the stories' which makes the tour 'a lively, spine-chilling and accurate portrayal of Edinburgh's grisly past'" (58, quoting personal communication with Mercat Tours, emphasis added).

If Mercat expresses the authenticity of its tours' content through the characterisation of history as "a damned good story," then, its corresponding authenticating metaphor on the performance plane is that history needs "damned good telling." Accordingly, the predominant way in which authenticity as performance is symbolised within the company's discourse is through the self-portrayal of its guides as

"storytellers." As with the company's strategic appropriation of the "tradition of <u>cadies</u>," authenticity in this sense has to do, in part, with the self-conscious continuation or "reinvention" of a perceived authentic local folk cultural tradition. Mercat is by no means alone in its use of this particular authenticating strategy. Identification of their tours as "storytelling" and their guides as "storytellers" is a technique used by several other straight ghost tour companies in the UK and beyond. The Haunted Walk of York, for example, advertises its tours as "[t]raditional storytelling at its best" (flier; advertising board), while the Original Ghost Walk of York promises "a unique opportunity to discover the hidden magic of our Ancient City through the real art of storytelling" (flier; http://www.yorkshirenet.co.uk/yorkghostwalk/). The St. John's Haunted Hike "brings you old fashioned storytelling at its dramatic and spine-tingling best" (flier), while the operators of the Historic Murfreesboro Ghost Tour are "proud to continue the tradition of storytelling in Eastern North Carolina" (http://members.aol.com/_ht_a/alwparker/ ghosttour/index.htm/).

From comments made during interviews, it is clear that Mercat's guides identify themselves particularly strongly with the role of storyteller and that this, for them, is a central component of the company's claims to authenticity. Gordon, for example, states that "we like to think … that we're continuing storytelling in its truest form… We are storytellers. In the old sense of storytelling, we tell stories… We embellish them, we give details, we describe the atmosphere… We try and bring these stories back to life" (Stewart, quoted in Mathers 11). Iain, meanwhile, draws "a very strong connection"

between the role of the ghost tour guide and that of "the old seanachaidh[28] of Scotland,

the old storytelling culture," describing the ghost tour as "part of the oral tradition" and

asserting that Mercat's guides are "not just telling stories, … we're continuing on [sic]

Edinburgh's folklore traditions" (Cameron). Steve, too, likens the role of the ghost tour

guide to "the traditional role of the storyteller," expressing a belief that "by telling these

age-old stories," the company's guides are "presenting … an aspect of the popular

history, the oral culture." In Steve's view, these are perspectives on Edinburgh's past

which have been consistently marginalised and devalued by academic historians and

which thus represent "something that should be heard" (Humphreys, interview).

Kathleen, meanwhile, effectively syncretises the "tradition of cadies" with that of

"Scottish storytelling" in general, stating that the role of Mercat's guides "is to be cadies,

is to be old Scottish storytellers, the bard with all the stories to tell" (Brogan).

Through their appropriation of the role of the traditional storyteller, then, the

Mercat guides construct their own performances as an authentic representation of a local

"oral culture." Like the company's reinvention of the "tradition of cadies," such rhetoric

conveniently glosses over the complex processes of recontextualisation and

commodification that the narratives undergo in the course of their appropriation into the

company's discourse. These processes call into question "the fine borderline between

story as a piece of folklore and story as a 'product', a commodity" (Kauppi 1).

Nonetheless, the construction of its performances as "part of the oral tradition"

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[28] Alexander MacBain translates seanachaidh as "a reciter of ancient lore, a historian" (305), while Edward Dwelly defines it as a "[r]eciter of tales or stories" (798-9).

constitutes a powerful authenticating strategy within the Mercat Tours discourse which fits well with its characterisation of history as "a damned good story" which needs "damned good telling." In particular, the Mercat guides' self-presentation as "storytellers" bears a close resemblance to Hannabuss's description of the way in which stories – and the aura of authenticity they bestow upon the performance – may "become embodied, literally, in the person taking visitors around a heritage site, what [David] Lowenthal called the 'curator as bard'" (361).

Significantly, although straight ghost tour companies such as Mercat employ a powerful rhetoric of authenticity in order to construct a dichotomy between their own performances and those of other companies, the actual relationship between the "straight" and "fake" performance aesthetics is considerably more complex and ambiguous than such rhetoric suggests. Indeed, as some of Mercat's own employees openly acknowledge, the relationship between the two might more appropriately be characterised as a continuum than a dichotomy. Steve, for example, suggests that the "theatricality" of any given Mercat tour can be measured on a "sliding scale" according to a range of factors, including the guides' own performance styles, the ways in which they adapt their performances to suit the needs of each individual audience, and so on (Humphreys, interview). Moreover, in its promotional materials, as Andrew points out, the company advertises not only that its guides are "graduate historians" but also that they have "a flair for dramatic presentation" (Morris, interview; see Mercat Tours, flier; http://www.mercat-tours.co.uk/), a claim which clearly leads audience members to expect that each tour will incorporate at least some element of theatricality.

As such comments suggest, the ambiguous relationship between the straight and fake performance aesthetics as conceptualised within the Mercat Tours discourse is most clearly evidenced in the variety of the performance styles adopted by the company's individual guides. Snow states that "there is a spectrum between the poles of actor and historian" among the interpreters at Plimoth Plantation and that "most interpreters are probably better suited to one than the other" (133). Significantly, Frances identifies a similar spectrum within the role of the ghost tour guide, "split[ting] ... up" Mercat's own guides into "three main types" according to which, she argues, the majority of their performance styles can be categorised (McBrierty, interview). Firstly, in accordance with the rhetoric of authenticity as performance discussed above, there are what she calls the "storytellers," those guides who rely primarily on "the power of word." Although they may "occasionally ... throw in the odd scream," these guides "don't rely on" such theatrical performance techniques in order to "create the atmosphere" on their tours and to elicit responses from their audiences. They are the guides to whom Andrew refers when he comments: "You get some guides who have no props and who are very, very mysterious." They correspond to the "historian" pole of Snow's spectrum, although, in light of the prominence of "a sense of story" within the Mercat Tours discourse, it is not surprising that Frances names this type "storyteller" rather than "historian."

Indeed, ironically, it can be argued that through its identification as a "type" within the company's discourse, the role of storyteller or historian itself assumes the status of a theatrical character. The "storyteller" guide is thus regarded as playing a role in a similar way that living history involves "the generification of the [historical] other

into a persona that the reenactor may take on (e.g., Union footsoldier, Pilgrim cooper, prairie schoolmistress)" (Handler and Saxton 253). Tacit acknowledgement of this process can be detected in comments made by the company's own employees. Kathleen, for example, states that "in a way that's our character, … is to be old Scottish storytellers, the bard with all the stories to tell" (Brogan, emphasis added). Similarly, Iain comments that the presentation of the company's guides "as historians … and storytellers" itself constitutes a type of "character" which is "brought out" on the company's tours: "it's like, well, we are the historian that know[s] all about this sort of thing. The slightly crazy scientist-type bloke" (Cameron). Steve compares the company's tours to "one of these films like Tales from the Crypt," with its guides fulfilling the role of "the old sage, the oracle, who's … going to tell you this tale" (Humphreys, interview).

Andrew, meanwhile, makes a similar point with reference to the "uniform" worn by the company's guides. According to Frances, this black hooded cloak, worn over black or dark-coloured clothing, is intended to distinguish Mercat's guides from those of other Edinburgh ghost tour companies whose tours are conducted in character (see Figure 2.4). However, Andrew points out that the cloak itself constitutes a kind of theatrical costume. As he comments, "it does have that flair of drama to it; I think we do dress up." Specifically, he believes that the cloak provides the appropriate garb in which to play the role of "the storyteller": "it's the right look for a ghost storyteller. It does have that storyteller look" (Morris, interview). Like Kathleen's "bard with all the stories to tell," Iain's "slightly crazy scientist-type bloke" and Steve's "old sage" from Tales from the Crypt, Andrew's characterisation of the Mercat tour guide as the black-cloaked "ghost

Figure 2.4. "that storyteller look": the persona adopted by the Mercat guides clearly draws on and plays with current popular cultural images and stereotypes of "the storyteller."

storyteller" (who not only tells his audience ghost stories but is himself a mysterious, ghostly figure) clearly draws on and plays with current popular cultural images and stereotypes of "the storyteller." This theatricalisation of the role of storyteller within the Mercat Tours discourse further complicates the relationship between the straight and fake performance aesthetics, blurring as it does the distinction often drawn by employees of Mercat and other straight ghost tour companies between "storytelling" and "theatre."

The second "type" of performance style identified by Frances are what she calls the "really way-out, 'Waaagh!' people" – those guides whose performance styles are "scary" and "demonstrative" and whom she describes as being "just mad, essentially!" (McBrierty, interview). These guides are located at the opposite end of the spectrum from the "storyteller" guides. Of the guides I interviewed at the company, Andrew identifies himself most closely with this second type, stating that the "mysterious" style of the storyteller guides is "not me," that "I'm in for the big show," and also using the word "Waaagh!" to describe his own style (Morris, interview). Similarly, Iain comments that "I probably err more towards the dramatic, jump-up-and-down, 'Baaah!' at people" end of the spectrum, although he situates his own performance style "somewhere in between" the "very storytelling style" exhibited by some of the company's guides and the "very dramatic style" of others (Cameron).[30]

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[30] Iain's position is thus akin to that of Plimoth Plantation interpreter Leonard Travers, who states that although he "didn't feel like an actor," nonetheless "I certainly did still think of it [his work as an interpreter] often in theatrical terms: whether or not I was 'hamming it up'...[,] whether or not my role was believable, things of that nature" (Snow 134).

While Iain remains ambivalent in his attitude towards the actor identity, stressing that his own performance style exhibits "much stronger connections to [storytelling traditions] than with … theatre," Andrew, in contrast, openly expresses a belief that Mercat's performances are "street theatre." He explains that "[o]therwise, we wouldn't put on the black cloaks. We wouldn't have the props, [we] wouldn't have the whipping." Similarly, Kathleen describes how "the most common questions we're asked are, 'Are you an actress?' or an actor," to which she responds: "Yes, without a doubt. It's a dramatic performance, you are in performance the whole time" (Brogan).[31] Frances herself feels that Mercat's performances as a whole exhibit "more of a connection with theatre rather than storytelling" and comments that "I think it's always been something that most guides have associated themselves with more" (McBrierty, interview), an observation which is borne out by comments such as those made by Andrew and Kathleen. Indeed, at least one of the company's previous employees was a professional actress ("Acting up" n.p.).

The company's "way-out, Waaagh!" guides, then, are situated at or near the "actor" pole of the spectrum identified by Snow. Their style is purposely and overtly theatrical and they make use of exaggerated and stylised gestures and tones of voice in order to elicit desired responses from their audiences. As Andrew suggests, they may

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[31] One of the interpreters interviewed by Snow similarly describes the performances at Plimoth Plantation as "street theatre" and Snow notes that "[w]hen they return from their tour of the Pilgrim Village, the first question the visitors ask is: 'Are these people actors and actresses?'" (205, 46). Witchery tour manager Lorna Baxter also points out that her company's performances have "often been described as street theatre" and that "people very often think we're all actors" (interview; see Chapter Three).

also make use of "props" to a greater extent than other guides. In effect, then, their style incorporates many of those same theatrical performance techniques which, when used in the context of other companies' tours, are condemned as hopelessly inauthentic within Mercat's own rhetoric. Thus, in stark contrast to the claims implicit in such rhetoric, whether audience members get to experience a "more serious" ghost tour or a "big show" is, in the end, part of "the gamble they take over the different guides" employed by the company itself (Morris, interview). It cannot be guaranteed in advance by choosing Mercat over a more "theatrical" ghost tour company.

The last of the "three main types" of guide identified by Frances are what she calls the "middle-of-the-road" guides. These, she states, are "actually the best ones, because they have these wonderful elements of storytelling and they also have enough of the 'Waaagh!' stuff" (McBrierty, interview). This accords with Snow's suggestion that, in the case of Plimoth Plantation, "the best interpreters integrate the two functions, becoming true actor/historians" (133). Despite the dichotomisation of the straight and fake performance aesthetics which underpins the company's rhetoric of authenticity as performance, this integration of the two functions is also the model which Mercat presents to its own guides as the ideal towards which they should aspire. Rather than aiming for either the "storyteller" or the "way-out, 'Waaagh!'" style, the company's employees are encouraged to incorporate elements of both types in developing their own styles. As Frances states, the best guides are those who occupy the "middle-of-the-road" area between the two.

Thus although, like Plimoth Plantation interpreter Nancy Mindick, Andrew perceives himself as being "definitely located toward the actor end of the actor – historian spectrum," like Nancy, too, he is "serious about [his] play" and about bringing "good 'content' to [his] performance" (Snow 137). This is evidenced by the emphasis he places on the need for a "balance" between drama and history in the context of the company's tours. As he explains:

> Witchery [Tours], certainly, has a lot more dramatics than we do, they've got people jumping out. I think that really is drama. I think we're a kind of medium between the two. You get the other ones where the people ... just [have] a T-shirt on, I've seen tours done with 'Tour Guide' on his T-shirt. That is really playing it down a lot, I think that's just, 'Hello and welcome to Blah-blah Tours. This is what happened.' ... I think the way we do it, .... it's a happy medium between drama [and history]. .... I think ... the majority of people want that dramatic edge. But not full-blown – you know, tell them rubbish but just do it in a great way. There has to be that balance between the two. (Morris, interview, emphasis in original)

Although he believes that most audience members on the company's tours expect to enjoy a "dramatic edge" to the performance, then, Andrew also emphasises the fact that it is not enough to "tell them rubbish but just do it in a great way" – to make compromises to historical accuracy in the interests of presenting a "full-blown" dramatic performance. Rather, as he states, the most important thing is to achieve "that balance between the two."

The relationship of the straight and fake performance aesthetics embodies complexities that characterise more general tensions between authenticity as historical accuracy and authenticity as performance as they are conceived within the Mercat Tours discourse. According to Snow, conflict between dual goals of education and entertainment at Plimoth Plantation accounts for much of the ambivalence expressed by

its employees with regard to the actor identity. Some of those he interviewed, for example, "value the educational mission of the living history performance over its theatrical aspect" and therefore believe that its "pedagogical objectives are more important than the portrayal of believable characters." Others, meanwhile, feel that "the present-day plantation is most successful as a form of entertainment" and that it "has more value as theatre than it does as historical information" (134, 140). Snow himself describes how "education is Plimoth Plantation's primary purpose," but how, in order "to accomplish this goal, both the entertainment and aesthetic value of the role-playing have become extremely important," while, conversely, "Verifiable information compensates for the 'fictiveness' of the role-playing and justifies the overall performance" (44, 48).

In her study of ghost and history tours in Edinburgh, Tellervo Kauppi identifies a similar tension between different meanings of authenticity in this context. Specifically, she suggests that the nature of the ghost tour performance requires guides to mediate between the demands of authenticity as historical accuracy and the need to present a dramatic performance which provides an entertaining experience – what David Brown calls an "authentically good time" (quoted in Wang 50) – for a paying audience. As she writes: "in order to both be [sic] historically accurate to the best of his/her knowledge, and entertaining to the best of his/her talent, the guide has to make some excuses" (16). In other words, the guide must make compromises to authenticity in both of the above senses.

This chapter has focused on the complex nature of this tension as it manifests itself within the discourse of Mercat Tours. Although the company's official rhetoric

suggests that its own performance aesthetic stands in opposition to those of other ghost tour companies which make use of "inauthentic" theatrical techniques, under closer inspection we have seen that it can be more accurately situated at the midpoint of a continuum between "history" and "drama," "straight" and "fake." Thus it is the "middle-of-the-road" guides and not, as its rhetoric of authenticity as performance leads us to expect, the "storytellers," who are perceived as the "best" guides within the company's discourse. Similarly, we saw in the previous section that Mercat projects an official rhetoric of authenticity as historical accuracy or "just the facts," by which it positions itself in opposition to the practice of "making things up" allegedly indulged in by the city's other ghost tour operators. However, its characterisation of history as story, the significance attributed to "'emotive' and 'affinitive' knowledge" and the very process by which its guides learn the history presented on their tours all encode a markedly different perception of history in which "the facts" alone are not enough to constitute an effective ghost tour performance. Thus there is a significant disjunction between the company's official rhetoric and its practice. Officially Mercat endorses an ideology of authenticity that is clear-cut and unproblematic, while its enacting of that ideology reveals various ambiguous, sometimes competing, conceptualisations of authenticity within its discourse.

## Conclusion

In analysing an ideology of authenticity which informs the activities of Edinburgh's Mercat Tours in this chapter, I have suggested that the ghost tour offers a

key illustration of modern tourism's "quest for authenticity." In exploring one particular

manifestation of this quest, I have presented authenticity as a negotiable, socially

constructed concept. To understand the ways in which the meanings of this concept are

negotiated within the Mercat Tours discourse, I have argued for the adoption of an emic

perspective on the complex processes by which authenticity is constructed and presented

by the company's employees at all levels. In this chapter, three distinct but interrelated

conceptualisations of authenticity – authenticity as originality, authenticity as historical

accuracy and authenticity as performance – have emerged within the company's

discourse and contribute to its overall ideology. Significantly, there is a clear disjunction

between the company's official rhetoric which suggests that the issue of in/authenticity is

unproblematic and dichotomous in nature and the actual contradictions and incongruities

that manifest themselves throughout its own ideology of authenticity. This accords with

Bruner's interpretation of authenticity as a "struggle" characterised by "paradoxes,

ambiguities, and ironies" (405).

In the chapter which follows, this theme of the complex nature of in/authenticity

is further developed through an analysis of the discourse of a second Edinburgh-based

ghost tour company, Witchery Tours, whose ethos can be seen as in many ways

diametrically opposed to that of Mercat. I focus in particular on exploring in greater

depth, and from the opposing perspective, the relationship between the straight and fake

performance aesthetics introduced in the final section of this chapter. In so doing, I argue

that while the case of Mercat Tours exemplifies the model of modern tourism as a "quest

for authenticity," that of Witchery conversely epitomises that of "postmodern-" or "post-

tourism," in which the "serious quest for authenticity" is overshadowed by the "playful

search for enjoyment" (Cohen, "Contemporary" 21).

# Chapter Three: WITCHERY TOURS

## AND THE TOURISM OF POSTMODERNITY

**"a light-hearted look at Edinburgh's darker side" – Witchery Tours, flier**

This chapter analyses the discourse of a second Edinburgh-based ghost tour company, Witchery Tours. This company began life as "The Cadies" in February 1984,[1] when cofounders Robin Mitchell and Colin MacPhail began conducting "personalised walking tours of the Royal Mile" for small groups (Baxter, "Business" 1). In 1985, the pair met James Thomson, owner of The Witchery restaurant on Castlehill, who at the time "was looking for guides to set up tours for people dining in the restaurant." As Robin explains, "People would go out for dinner [at The Witchery] and if they wanted they would phone us up, and … a table of four or a table of six would go on this theme tour. This is where the idea of the Witchery Tour came from" (Mitchell, quoted in Mathers 18). All of Witchery's tours still start from outside The Witchery restaurant. The tours are managed by Lorna Baxter and the company is directed by cofounder Robin Mitchell and his wife, Alison.[2] At the time of my field research in summer 2000,

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[1] For a discussion of <u>cadies</u> and the ambiguity surrounding the issue of which company, Mercat or Witchery, is Edinburgh's "original" ghost tour company, see Chapter Two.

[2] Robin bought out Colin MacPhail's share of the business in December 1992 (Baxter, "Cadies/Witchery" 3).

Witchery employed sixteen guides and dealt with over 30,000 customers per year, of whom around 60% were local (Baxter, interview).

Like Mercat, Witchery operates two ghost tours, the "Murder & Mystery Tour" and the "Ghosts & Gore Tour." The "Murder & Mystery Tour" was launched in October 1985 and by the following summer was operating seven nights a week (Baxter, "Cadies/Witchery" n.p.). It is advertised as a "historical walking tour of Old Town Edinburgh," during which audience members are invited to "[v]isit the scenes of many horrific tortures, murders and supernatural happenings within the historic old town" (Baxter, "Business" 1; Witchery Tours, http://www.witcherytours.com/). At the time of my field research, this tour ran nightly at 9pm and 10pm year-round, lasted approximately seventy-five minutes and cost £7 per person including a copy of the book Adam Lyal's Witchery Tales (Mitchell), which contains many of the stories told on the tour.

The "Ghosts & Gore Tour" was launched in April 1987 (Baxter, "Business" 1) and at the time of my field research ran at 6.30pm and 8pm nightly from May through August, lasted 1½ hours and cost £7 for adults and £4 for children (including the Witchery Tales book). This tour is billed as "[a] unique and highly entertaining tour in the old town of Edinburgh," during which audience members "hear well researched stories and visit the scenes of horrendous tortures, punishments and executions common in days gone by" (Witchery Tours, http://www.witcherytours.com/). It is considered to be especially suitable for children.

Witchery is the only Edinburgh ghost tour company which does not feature a visit to either a graveyard or a section of the city's underground vaults on any of its tours. Both the "Murder & Mystery Tour" and the "Ghosts & Gore Tour" take place entirely in streets, closes and courtyards on and around the Royal Mile. The most significant difference between Mercat and Witchery Tours is that the latter's tours are conducted entirely in character and feature "jumper-ooters" as well as theatrical props and gimmicks. The characters featured on the company's tours are discussed later in this chapter.

Like Mercat, a significant portion of Witchery's business consists of corporate hospitality and private group bookings. The company offers occasional speciality tours within Edinburgh and beyond, as well as "Special Appearances" at clients' events and venues (Witchery Tours, "Special"). Witchery has published three books, all written and researched by its own employees (see Mitchell; Priddle; Wallace et al.), and has released four videos dealing with various aspects of the "fables, phantoms and folklore" of Edinburgh and Scotland (Witchery Tours, "Books & Videos"). In March 1991 the company was "Highly Commended" by the administrators of the Bill Heron Trophy (1990) "for outstanding contribution to Scottish Tourism." In October 1992 it was runner-up in the Small Business Marketing category of the Scottish Tourist Board's Scottish Thistle Awards for Tourism (Baxter, "Business" 2-3). Its activities have enjoyed widespread coverage in local, national and international newspapers, television and radio (e.g., see Clough; Hannan and MacGregor; "The tourist season").

In the previous chapter, I argued that the concept of authenticity, symbolised in a number of distinct yet interrelated ways, is fundamental to the discourse of Mercat Tours. As I demonstrated, this exemplifies the still-dominant mode of contemporary tourism as a modernistic "quest for authenticity" (MacCannell, Tourist; "Staged"). Not all ghost tour companies, however, exhibit such concern for "truth," "realness" and "genuineness." In contrast, in this chapter I contend that the discourse of Witchery Tours deeply problematises and even subverts the notion that authenticity is a desirable or achievable outcome of the touristic encounter. My analysis is intended in particular to examine further the contrast between the "straight" performance aesthetic explored in the latter part of the previous chapter and the postmodern or "fake" aesthetic which informs the performances of Witchery Tours. In the pages which follow, I show how Witchery's discourse shares several of what Peter Narváez identifies as "the characteristics of postmodern social condition and aesthetic practice," including "the playful, promiscuous mixing of codes and styles, the lack of a self-centering identity, the merging of audience and artist, the collapse of cultural hierarchy, a celebration of the immediate and the ordinary, and an emphasis on visual, figurative rather than linear, literary sensibility" (173).

I draw on work by scholars who question MacCannell's interpretation of tourism as a quest for authenticity and, in particular, I look to recent discussions of "postmodern-" or "post-tourism." Post-tourism is a tourist experience characterised by an awareness on the part of both producers and consumers that transcendent authenticity does not exist and in which tourism thus becomes a playful "game" rather than a serious "quest." As in

the previous chapter, my analysis is structured around a single concept which features prominently throughout the company's discourse and which informs its activities at a number of levels. In Witchery's case, I argue, this central concept is that of <u>light-heartedness</u>. With this as my focus, I begin by discussing the developing debate on postmodern tourism. I then go on to explore four distinct meanings of light-heartedness as the concept manifests itself within the Witchery Tours discourse and relate them to characteristics of the emerging postmodern touristic ethos.

Witchery's tour manager, Lorna Baxter, highlights the importance of <u>light-heartedness</u> to her company and suggests several meanings:

> we do go for a fairly light-hearted angle on the whole thing. Although the subject matter that we're dealing with is fairly dark, we try to do it in quite an entertaining way, so that the stories are punctuated with little gags and props. And of course the ghostly characters do add – as well as a little scare it does add that little bit of hilarity to it. So it is Scotland's history in quite an easily digestible form... (interview)

Firstly, then, Lorna uses the term <u>light-hearted</u> to refer to the humorous, entertaining style in which the company's tours are presented, contrasting this style with the predominantly "dark" tone of their subject matter or content. This is the sense of the term most frequently intended by the company's employees when speaking about the light-heartedness of their performances and corresponds to the first dictionary definition of <u>light-hearted</u> as literally "[h]aving a light heart; cheerful" (<u>OED</u>). Thus the company's performances are billed as "a light-hearted look at Edinburgh's darker side" and potential audience members are assured that "[w]hilst [the] subject matter is dark, the approach is very light hearted" (Witchery Tours, flier; "Special"). Similarly, tour guide Cameron Pirie states that although the company's tours "[focus] on the darker side of the history:

hangings, murders, witchcraft, torture," and so on, its approach to its subject matter is based on the premise that "we can look back on it now with a laugh" (interview).

That light-heartedness in this sense constitutes a conscious and deliberate performance aesthetic within the Witchery Tours discourse is indicated by its employees' descriptions of the way in which this approach was purposely adopted by the company over time. As Lorna states: "At first, ... it was all fairly sinister, quite serious. But as the years have gone on this comic angle has come in" (Baxter, interview). Similarly, company director and cofounder Robin Mitchell explains that "quite early on we realised, 'Well, we're going to have to inject some humour into this because people [are] just not really taking it all too seriously.' So ... over the years it's ventured more towards the light-hearted" (quoted in Mathers 22).

Implicit in such descriptions of the company's performance aesthetic, however, is a second dictionary definition of the term light-hearted as being "[n]ot serious," "(unduly) casual" or "thoughtless" (OED). This meaning of light-heartedness as the concept manifests itself within the Witchery Tours discourse is explored in the first section of this chapter, where I argue that the company's light-hearted ethos manifests itself in a significant lack of concern for historical accuracy or authenticity, to the extent that this concern occasionally gives way entirely to an overtly postmodernistic delight in the inauthentic and the "fake." A second meaning, explored in the following section, is suggested by Lorna's reference to the theatricality of the company's performances, with their incorporation of "ghostly characters" and of "gags and props." Accordingly, I argue that the concept of light-heartedness relates also to the "celebrat[ion of] fictive and

dramaturgical values" and to the emphasis placed on "visual spectacle and play" within the company's discourse (Rojek 134; Urry 84). These features clearly mark its performances as an instance of postmodern tourism. In the following section, I go on to suggest that the company's light-hearted approach also results in a peculiarly "postmodern thrill" (Snow 208) on the part of both performers and audience, as the company's guides engage in playfully drawing their audiences' attention away from their tours' narrative content towards the incongruities and inauthenticities inherent in the performance situation itself. Lastly, as Lorna indicates, the term light-heartedness is used within the company's discourse to refer to the fact that, unlike those of some other ghost tour companies, Witchery's tours are not (nor are they intended to be) genuinely fear-inducing. This fourth meaning of the concept, and in particular the relationship between "fright" and "fear" as it reflects on the issue of in/authenticity, is explored in the final section of this chapter.

## Tourism as Play: Beyond Authenticity

In recent years, a number of scholars have suggested that "the 'search for authenticity' is too simple a foundation for explaining contemporary tourism" (Wang 46, quoting John Urry). Erik Cohen, for example, argues that although the tourist who travels in search of "total authenticity" "often serves as the prototype of the ideal tourist, he [sic] is, statistically speaking, a minority among the huge population of contemporary mass tourism." In contrast, "The vast majority of tourists do not demand such a 'total

authenticity'" ("Authenticity" 378). Moreover, as Cohen points out, "MacCannell and others who adopted his conceptual framework did not raise the possibility that the tourist and social analyst may conceive of authenticity in different terms." Thus such scholars' portrayal of modern tourists as the unwitting victims of a touristic establishment which presents "staged authenticity" as if it were real is based on the assumption that, "if the tourist had the analyst's debunking knowledge, he would reject the 'staged authenticity' of the sights as contrived and lacking in authenticity" (374).

A significant consequence of this assumption, Cohen argues, is its failure "to account convincingly for the fact that so many blatantly inauthentic attractions do, in fact, attract many tourists." As he points out:

> many attractions are so lightly staged, and their inauthenticity is so easily recognizable, that one has to assume that tourists must be inordinately stupid or naïve to accept them seriously as authentic. Moreover, there is one class of attractions, the overtly staged ones, which make no claim to authenticity, and still attract great numbers of visitors. ("Play" 292)

Cohen takes issue with Daniel Boorstin's critique of modern tourism as "a shallow, superficial, trivial and often frivolous activity" that depends upon a tourist who is "gullible to the extreme, easy to be taken in by blatantly inauthentic or outrightly contrived, commercialized displays," or in Boorstin's terminology, "pseudo-events" (Cohen, "Phenomenology" 184; cf. Boorstin 77-117; see Chapter Two). Instead, Cohen forges a theoretical middle ground between the opposing interpretations of modern tourism put forward by Boorstin and by MacCannell, paving the way for "an alternative interpretation which makes superfluous a recourse to either the tourist's ignorance or superficiality, or the cunning of the touristic establishment" ("Play" 298).

Cohen points out that a major flaw of the "contrasting conceptions of tourists" which emerge from the work of Boorstin and of MacCannell lies in the fact that "the proponents of each claim to describe 'the tourist' as a general type, while implicitly or explicitly denying the adequacy of the alternative conception." In contrast, he makes the point that "[d]ifferent kinds of people may desire different modes of tourist experiences" and hence that "'the tourist' does not exist as a type" ("Phenomenology" 180; cf. "Traditions" 43). In fact, one of his own most significant contributions to tourism research is his fivefold typology of "[p]henomenologically distinct modes of touristic experiences." These he ranks according to the extent to which the modern individual is alienated from the "centre" of her own society and to which, as a result, tourism represents for that individual a search for meaning (or "authenticity") in the centres of others.

As such, the five modes of touristic experience distinguished by Cohen also relate more generally to "the place and significance of tourism in a modern person's life," "span[ning] the spectrum between the experience of the tourist in pursuit of 'mere' pleasure in the strange and the novel, to that of the modern pilgrim in quest for meaning at somebody else's centre" ("Phenomenology" 180, 183). For tourists travelling in the third, fourth and fifth modes, which Cohen designates "experiential," "experimental" and "existential," respectively, "the authenticity of the experience is crucial for its meaning."[3]

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[3] Cohen uses the term "experiential" to describe the mode of tourism occurs when individuals "disenchanted or alienated" with the values of their own society "becoming growingly aware of their state of alienation, and the meaninglessness and fatuity of their daily life," and choose to "look for meaning in the life of others." However, the experiential tourist seeks to "recapture meaning by a vicarious, essentially aesthetic,

The desire for authentic experiences on the part of such tourists can thus be seen as essentially equivalent to that which "MacCannell finds characteristic of tourism in general" (194, 186).[4]

In contrast, however, tourists travelling in the first two modes of Cohen's typology, the "recreational" and the "diversionary" modes, exhibit comparatively little or even no concern for the authenticity of their experiences. Thus, contrary to MacCannell's global portrayal of all tourists as seekers after authenticity, Cohen's typology of touristic experiences suggests that a significant proportion of tourists "[do] not actively seek 'authenticity'" ("Play" 293, emphasis added). In the "diversionary mode," he argues, tourism represents "a mere escape from the boredom and meaninglessness of routine, everyday existence, into the forgetfulness of a vacation."

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experience of the authenticity of the life of others"; thus "he ... remains aware of their 'otherness'" and "is not 'converted' to their life, nor does he accept their authentic lifeways" ("Phenomenology" 186-8). It is the "vicariousness" of the experience which differentiates the experiential mode from the "experimental" and "existential" modes. The "experimental mode" is that in which "travellers" (rather than "tourists") "try out alternative life-ways in their quest for meaning." While the experiential tourist "remains ... content merely to observe the authentic life of others, the traveller in the 'experimental' mode engages in that authentic life, but refuses fully to commit himself to it; rather, he samples and compares the different alternatives, hoping eventually to discover one which will suit his particular needs and desires" (189). In contrast, the fifth and final mode, the "existential mode," "in its extreme form is characteristic of the traveller who is fully committed to an 'elective' spiritual centre, i.e., one external to the mainstream of his native society and culture. The acceptance of such a centre comes phenomenologically closest to a religious conversion, to 'switching worlds'" (189-90).

[4] In fact, Cohen argues that it is the "experiential" mode, located at the midpoint of his typology, which "characterizes the tourist as he emerges from MacCannell's description," that is, as engaged in "a modern form of the essentially religious quest for authenticity" ("Phenomenology" 187). Thus tourists travelling in the "experimental" and "existential" modes pursue the quest for authenticity still further than is allowed for in MacCannell's analysis (cf. Cohen, "Play" 294).

This mode, he suggests, is "characteristic of the modern man who, though alienated from the 'center' of his socio-culture, does not seek a new, alternative center." Tourists travelling in the diversionary mode, though "[t]heir life, strictly speaking, is 'meaningless,'" nonetheless "are not looking for meaning, whether in their own society or elsewhere." Thus, unlike "recreational" tourism (see below), travel in the diversionary mode "does not re-establish adherence to a meaningful centre, but only makes alienation endurable" ("Phenomenology" 185-6; "Play" 293).[5]

In the "recreational mode," meanwhile, Cohen argues that "[t]he trip ... is a form of entertainment akin in nature to other forms of entertainment such as the cinema, theatre, or television." The recreational tourist "'enjoys' his trip, because it restores his physical and mental powers and endows him with a general sense of well-being." However, "He does not have a deep commitment to travel as a means of self-realization or self-expansion." The recreational mode, Cohen suggests, is "characteristic of the tourist who altogether identifies with the mundane centers of modern, secular Western society ... but travels essentially in search of a physical and mental restoration from the stresses of modern life." It is "the mode of touristic experiences which a structuralist-

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[5] The relative positioning of these first two modes within Cohen's model is somewhat ambiguous. In the article where he first sets out his typology, Cohen ranks the diversionary mode above the recreational, since the diversionary tourist is alienated from the "centre" of her home society as the recreational tourist is not ("Phenomenology" 183; cf. "Traditions" 36). When speaking about the extent to which the tourist seeks meaning (or "authenticity") through her travels, however, he reverses the order of the two modes, since recreational tourists in fact derive a deeper meaning from their experiences than do diversionary tourists, who "remain totally in equanimity and unconcerned with the problem of authenticity" ("Authenticity" 377; see also "Play" 293).

functionalist analysis of society would lead us to expect as typical for modern man" ("Phenomenology" 183-4; "Play" 293).

Of all the types outlined in Cohen's phenomenology, it is the tourist travelling in the recreational mode who most resembles the image of "the tourist" as it emerges from Boorstin's critique. In stark contrast to Boorstin, however, Cohen argues that the "apparent gullibility" of the recreational tourist "ought not to be ascribed solely to his ignorance." Rather, he suggests that in recreational tourism "the tourist gets what he really wants – the pleasure of entertainment, for which authenticity is largely irrelevant." As he writes: "Since he seeks recreation, [the recreational tourist] is quite eager to accept the make-believe [of the tourist attraction] and not to question its authenticity," in the same way that "one does not need to be convinced of the authenticity of a TV play or a motion picture in order to enjoy it as a recreative, entertaining or relaxing experience." Thus "[r]ecreation-oriented tourists ... can completely legitimately enjoy themselves despite, or even ... because [of], the fact that the experience is not 'real'" – as, for example, in cases where "the real thing may be too terrifying or revolting, to be enjoyable" ("Phenomenology" 184).

Cohen argues that recreational tourism can thus be characterised as a "play at reality." The tourist adopts a non-serious, "'as if' attitude" towards her experiences, the essence of which lies in her "playful acceptance of the make believe presented by the attractions," even although "deep down" she may not be "convinced of [their] authenticity" ("Play" 295; "Authenticity" 377). Recreational tourists are distinguished by their "readiness for playful self-deception," their "willingness to go along with the

illusion that an often obviously contrived, inauthentic situation is real." As Cohen argues: "The playful attitude of the recreational tourist creates a predisposition to believe, akin to that found in a theatrical audience which is wholly involved with the action on the stage. Both involve a suspension of disbelief, a readiness to give oneself up to the performance" ("Play" 295, 298). Thus, whereas "[e]xperiential tourism is ... a 'serious' quest, akin to that of the pilgrimage," "recreational tourism, in contrast, is playfully 'frivolous' rather than 'serious'" (295). Edward Bruner makes a similar observation regarding the "playful quality" of the interaction between interpreters and visitors at the New Salem living history site in Illinois, suggesting that, in contrast to the "seriousness of the tourist quest and experience" emphasised in "much of the literature," such interactions "may be oriented to enjoyment as much as to discovery of historic fact" (410).

Such an interpretation renders irrelevant (at least in the case of recreational tourism) MacCannell's criticism that the "staging" of authenticity by the touristic establishment is a form of deception designed to lead tourists into a false belief that their earnest quest for authenticity has been fulfilled – what MacCannell calls a "false consciousness." Indeed, a significant consequence of the lack of concern exhibited by recreational tourists with regard to authenticity is that "[their] experience <u>cannot</u> be falsified," since they "can achieve [their] aim even when ... fully aware that [their] experience is staged in a 'tourist space'" (Cohen, "Phenomenology" 194, emphasis added). As a result, "The art of the tourist 'producer'" lies not in the ability "fully to camouflage the staging" in order to trick the tourist into thinking that a contrived

situation is real, but rather in the ability "to create in the tourist a semi-conscious illusion, and to engage his imagination until he is turned into a willing accomplice ... of the game of touristic make-believe" (194). Thus, as Cohen argues:

> recreation-oriented tourists should be looked upon less as shallow, easily gullible simpletons who believe any contraption to be 'real,' or as stooges of a prevaricating tourist establishment, but rather as persons who attend a performance or participate in a game; the enjoyability of the occasion is contingent on their willingness to accept the make-believe or half-seriously to delude themselves. In a sense, they are accomplices of the tourist establishment in the production of their own deception. (184)

The theatrical analogy suggested here by Cohen is also used by Stephen Snow to describe a similarly playful "suspension of disbelief" at work in the interactions of interpreters and visitors at the Plimoth Plantation living history site in Massachusetts. Snow states that:

> There is a well-defined code of etiquette for the encounter between interpreters and visitors that is essentially based on the polite and willing suspension of disbelief. In this 'play frame,' both parties have explicit expectations of the behavior and characteristics of the other. The most fundamental rule is that <u>the role-players will not be unmasked and thereby forced to lose face</u>. For the sake of the game, everybody will pretend that these are indeed the real Pilgrims. (170, emphasis in original)

Snow argues that "[t]he optimal situation occurs when both performers and spectators recognize the contradictions" inherent in the living history encounter "but agree to maintain the play frame anyway. The audience member signals the actor/historian [i.e., the interpreter]: 'I know you're not really a Pilgrim, but I'm going to play along with you, regardless.' The interpreter signals back: 'I know you know I'm not really a Pilgrim, but I'm going to perform as if I were, for your education and enjoyment'" (181). Similarly, in her work on living history reenactments, Viv Loveday suggests that "[r]e-enactment

provides a (relatively) safe and socially sanctioned liminal space which is time out of time, and there is an expectation that the 'civilian' population will cooperate thereby sanctioning [the reenactors'] alternate reality and respecting [their] performance space." In other words, she writes, it is expected that audience members will "play the game of treating [the reenactors] in the same frame of reference as Guisers, Morris Dancers, Mummers and other liminal characters," thereby sustaining "the illusion of liminality on which re-enactment depends" (72, emphasis added).

Such scholars' interpretations of recreational tourism "as play" lay the foundation for subsequent work by tourism researchers on "postmodern-" or "post-tourism," a form which has similarly been defined according to its "playfulness" (e.g., see Cohen, "Contemporary"; Feifer; Fife; Halewood and Hannam; McCrone et al.; Macdonald; Ritzer and Liska; Rojek; Snow; Urry; Wang). Cohen discusses post-tourism in a recent article on "Contemporary Tourism," where he records a significant shift in "the ... nature of tourist attractions and places ... from the natural and authentic to the artificial and contrived." In particular, he notes the trend in contemporary tourism development towards "attractions which are admittedly and overtly staged" (12, 18). He argues that such developments "[correspond] to an apparently pervasive shift in the dominant mode of experience desired by contemporary tourists":

> This mode, which is congruent with, and derives its legitimation from, the emerging 'post-modern ethos,' is that of playfulness. If the culturally sanctioned mode of travel of the modern tourist has been that of the serious quest for authenticity, the mode of the post-modern tourist is that of playful search for enjoyment. In the former, there is a cognitive preoccupation with the penetration of staged fronts into real backs, in the latter there is an aesthetic enjoyment of surfaces, whatever their cognitive status may be. The ludic attitude to attractions is becoming culturally

sanctioned, and may well in the future overshadow that of the serious quest for authenticity. (21-2)

Like Cohen, other researchers writing on postmodern tourism also speak of it primarily in terms of its "playful," "ludic" or "game-like" qualities. John Urry, for example, writes that postmodern tourists – or "post-tourists" (Feifer 259-68) – "[k]now that they are ... tourist[s] and that tourism is a game, or rather a whole series of games with multiple texts and no single, authentic tourist experience." Thus, rather than concerning themselves with the authenticity of their encounters with the tourist site, they "delight in the multitude of games that can be played." As George Ritzer and Allan Liska put it, "they play at and with touring" (Urry 100; Ritzer and Liska 102). Tourism thus becomes a playful "game" rather than a serious "quest."

A related characteristic of postmodern tourism is the tourist's "concern with the enjoyability of the surface appearance of the attraction, rather than with its 'reality' or 'authenticity'" (Cohen, "Contemporary" 22). Indeed, Ritzer and Liska have gone so far as to argue that "many tourists today are in search of inauthenticity" (107, emphasis added).[6] Thus, as Ning Wang writes, "the approaches of postmodernism seem to be characterized by the deconstruction of authenticity" in tourism and, conversely, by the "justification of the contrived, the copy, and the imitation" (54-5). The playfulness of postmodern tourism is linked to an "incredulity toward meta-narratives" on the part of its

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[6] The search for "inauthenticity" is, of course, not limited to tourism. As Regina Bendix notes, the proliferation of "things and experiences advertising their authenticity" in the last decades of the twentieth century has been accompanied by a converse "interest, if not delight, in imitation" and "the fake," manifesting itself in such diverse contexts as museum exhibitions, "[p]opular phenomena, such as Elvis look-alike contests and Karaoke singing," and film (Search 3-4).

participants (Lyotard 330): an awareness that, under the conditions of postmodernity, transcendent authenticity does not (cannot) exist. As Wayne Fife writes: "postmodern tourists … delight in the ironic mockery of modernist conceits such as the notion that 'true history' or 'authentic reconstructions' are within the realm of human attainment" (5).

Further, the playful deconstruction of authenticity in the context of postmodern tourism reflects the "destructuring [of] the boundaries between the copy and the original, or between sign and reality" (Wang 54) widely associated with postmodern culture in general. In the postmodern context, as Urry writes:

> Social identities are constructed through the exchange of sign-values. But these are accepted in a spirit of spectacle. … This world of sign and spectacle is one in which there is no real originality, only what Eco terms 'travels in hyperreality.' Everything is a copy, or a text upon a text, where what is fake seems more real than the real. This is a depthless world. (85)

Cohen refers to this depthlessness as "the nivellating tendency of the post-modern ethos," which, combined with its "stress on surfaces," results in the readiness evinced by postmodern tourists "to reduce or suspend the saliency of the boundaries between different 'provinces of meaning,' between fact and fiction, reality, reconstruction and fantasy." This means that, in the context of post-tourism, "all attractions, 'natural' and 'contrived,' realistic or fantastic, historical or futuristic, original or recreated," can potentially "co-exist within the same complex, as it were, on an equal standing" ("Contemporary" 22, 16). Post-tourism thus subverts the notion of a modernistic "hierarchy of attractions" constructed on the basis of meta-narratives such as authenticity and originality. The "post-modern touristic stance" is, then, "not a naïve, unwitting or

unconscious one," but rather is characterised by reflexivity and ironic detachment (25). As David McCrone et al. put it, "The post-tourist is self-conscious, cool and role-distanced" (35). Cohen sees this stance as "a consequence of radical secularization and of the breakthrough (or breakdown) of all absolute ('privileged') criteria of judgement and evaluation," the "rational penetration of all criteria as socially constructed" (25).

Such interpretations have led some writers to question the concept of post-tourism and particularly its assumption of, and reliance upon, the tourist's "intertextual interpretative skills," reflexivity and appreciation of irony (Macdonald 171). Thus, for example, McCrone et al. state that "[w]e ought ... to treat the concept of the post-tourist with caution. Few tourists are likely to be as sophisticated as this, and more fundamentally, how one would identify (and self-identify) a post-tourist is not at all clear" (36). Similarly, Sharon Macdonald warns that "[a]lthough it has been suggested that visitors are increasingly well-capable of recognising and enjoying irony, ... there is always a danger in such representations that this sophistication is overestimated." In her work on the Aros heritage centre on the Isle of Skye, Macdonald acknowledges that the centre's exhibition uses "non-realist styles ... ironically to signal the constructed nature of the representations which have come down to us," in a way which might be characterised as "postmodern." However, she argues that "irony and intertextualism are only used to make particular points: there is no play with styles for their own sake." Thus although the exhibition "uses many technologies of display that have been associated with the proliferation of, and even revelling in, inauthenticity, and more generally with a post-modern emphasis on style and surface rather than depth and processes of production,

it does not do so in order to dispense with questions of authenticity, authority, narrative and origins" (171).

Certainly, in the heritage context, where authenticity remains a central concern of both producers and consumers, the use of styles and techniques associated with the postmodern touristic ethos appears, at least at present, to be much less prominent than is suggested by Cohen for contemporary tourism as a whole. In light of his research at two Viking heritage sites on Newfoundland's Great Northern Peninsula, for example, Fife argues that "in terms of … sites such as Norstead and L'Anse aux Meadows, the occasional postmodern tweak on the nose of modernity is acceptable but that too many obviously 'fun but false' representations of the 'Viking past,' which might delight a young child or the occasional postmodern tourist, would in all likelihood alienate the vast majority of tourists who choose to visit there" (5). Similarly, in his work on the guides of English coach excursions, Christopher Holloway argues that "[m]ost guides perceive their prime role to be that of information-giver," a fact he attributes to "the emphasis placed on the acquisition of knowledge" during their training and to their concern for "[t]he accuracy of the information they impart to their passengers." Holloway suggests that although "[g]uides … may be forced reluctantly to adopt their subsidiary role of entertainer, … they find this role less satisfying" (386; cf. Cohen, "Tourist Guide"; Fine and Speer; C. Schmidt). Thus, as the ideology of authenticity within the Mercat Tours discourse also indicates, "Travellers and tourists have obviously not been replaced by post-tourists" (Rojek 178; cf. Chapter Two).

Nonetheless, the analysis of the Witchery Tours discourse presented in this chapter is intended to demonstrate that "post-tourist sensibilities are currently evident and growing" (Rojek 178). This is true even within the heritage sector, to the extent that, as Cohen suggests, they may well in future replace the "serious quest for authenticity" as the dominant mode of touristic experience. The overall aim of this chapter, then, is to reveal the fundamental influence of the postmodern touristic ethos on the discourse of Witchery Tours, by exploring ways in which many of the characteristics, styles and techniques of postmodern tourism identified above are consciously adopted, recognised and enjoyed by both the producers and the consumers of this particular touristic product.

## "history with humour and facts with fables": Light-heartedness and (in)authenticity

Caroline Mathers's comparison of the approaches adopted by Mercat and Witchery Tours towards their subject matter clearly articulates the contrast between the modernistic quest for authenticity which informs the Mercat Tours discourse and the playful post-touristic search for enjoyment manifested in Witchery's light-hearted performance aesthetic. She comments:

> The Witchery tours are geared at people who are not ... totally interested in the history. So they're not that bothered, you know, they like to learn a little bit of history, but if there's bits that are made up, and a few non-facts thrown in, all the better for them, they don't mind that. They're going for the entertainment, basically. ... [T]hat's what ... Witchery are selling, and that's why it works for them... Whereas Mercat Tours, all their guides ... have degrees in Scottish history ... or something to do with what they're

> selling. So their guides know more about history and that's what they're
> interested in. And they don't dress up in costumes and they don't jump
> out at you to give you frights and things, they just take you on tours and
> tell you the facts. So it's quite a different approach. (interview)

Caroline's interpretation of Witchery's approach as a form of "selling entertainment,"

and particularly her suggestion that "a few non-facts" or "bits that are made up" are seen

as contributing to rather than detracting from its audiences' enjoyment of its tours,

accords with several features of the postmodern touristic ethos discussed above. Most

notably, as I argue in this section, it suggests that the company's light-hearted

performance aesthetic manifests itself in part in an unashamed preoccupation "with the

enjoyability of the surface appearance of the attraction, rather than with its 'reality' or

'authenticity'" (Cohen, "Contemporary" 22).

     In addressing this issue, however, it should be qualified that its light-hearted

approach by no means signifies that accuracy and authenticity are unimportant to

Witchery Tours as a company, nor to its individual employees. Tour guide Cameron

Pirie, for example, stresses that "there's a lot of information, a lot of history" on the

company's tours, though the light-hearted style of its performances means that "[i]t might

not seem like that much, … because it's broken up with characters and visual stuff"

(interview). Indeed, like Mercat, Witchery takes considerable care and effort in

researching the historical material presented on its tours. As Cameron states, "I think

we've researched [the material] in great depth. A lot of work, a lot of effort went into the

research. … [W]e're trying to present it in a way which is as professional as possible."

The company's website reads that "[o]ur tours are authoritatively researched, and

expertly presented" (Witchery Tours, http://www.witcherytours.com/), while in his

introduction to one "Ghosts & Gore Tour" I attended, tour guide Richard Norman assures his audience that "all the stories I'm going to tell you are absolutely true. They've been well researched by ourselves from authentic sources."

During interviews, too, the company's employees repeatedly stress the importance of "history" and "historical accuracy" to their activities, stating variously that "the history is important to us," "it's really important that the history's right"; that "the crux of the tour[s] is the historical base"; that the company's performances "would be nothing without the history"; that "I think everybody expects a degree of accuracy on the tours, they'll expect what you're telling them to be true"; and that it is considered very important for guides to "[use] correct information, and [make] sure you … get the stories right" (Baxter; Mitchell, quoted in Mathers 23; Bankhead; Norman; K. Smith). As Lorna states: "we do like to be spot on and make sure that what we're telling people is true. Rather than presenting something in a way where people will believe it, and it's never actually happened, it's quite important that these things did happen. …. [I]t's always good to have your facts just so" (Baxter, interview). Similarly, tour guide Keith Smith comments that guides have a responsibility to their audiences to get "the facts" right: "if you're going to give dates, there's not much point in giving the wrong ones. It's not really fair treating people ignorantly and giving them false information" (interview). Another tour guide, David Martin, places a strong personal emphasis on historical accuracy, explaining that "before I did the tours I wasn't really that interested in Edinburgh's history. … But now I'm very interested in it, so it's very important to me that the stories [are not 'made up']" (interview).

Indeed, the company's employees sometimes speak about the use of humour in the context of their performances as if its sole function were to encourage audience members to absorb the tours' historical content: "we … throw the humour in just to make [the history] a wee bit more digestible for people"; "it's a good way of remembering history" (Baxter, interview; Pirie). Several employees contrast the light-hearted presentation of history on their tours with that in "lessons" or "books." As Lorna states, for example: "The history's presented, but people enjoy hearing about it, it's not sitting down and having a lesson and being bored to tears" (Baxter, interview). Similarly, David comments that the company's audiences "don't get historical evening classes coming along [on the tours], learning history…, they go read books to do that kind of thing. So they come [on the tours] to be entertained and that's my job, is to make the amazing history of Edinburgh entertaining" (Martin, interview).[7]

Implicit in such comments, however, is a suggestion that the light-hearted style of its performances often takes on a significance of its own within the company's discourse,

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[7] The "[explicit devaluation of] written history, history as it is found in books" is a common theme within the discourse of heritage practitioners, especially living historians (Handler and Saxton 243; cf. Handler and Gable 175; Macdonald 160). Similar comments to this effect are made by employees of other Edinburgh ghost tour companies. David Pollock of City of the Dead, for example, comments that "it's not a history lecture, it's a ghost tour. And it's nice to give people an idea of what's going on, but if they want to learn all that they would get a guidebook" (interview). Mercat's Andrew Morris, meanwhile, draws on personal experience, recalling that "[h]istory was actually really boring for me at school, because … my teacher was really boring, and I just didn't click with him. And we did very boring periods of history." In contrast, he states that "[t]his kind of history [i.e., the history presented on Mercat's tours] is great fun" (interview). We may also compare Andrew's colleague Frances McBrierty's comment that the characterisation of history as story within Mercat's discourse signifies in part that "[w]e don't want a dry, boring lecture" (interview; see Chapter Two).

quite apart from its usefulness as a vehicle for the effective communication of historical information. As Richard observes: "If you wanted to find out the history of Edinburgh ... then the more sensible place to look may be the library" (Norman, interview). Indeed, during interviews, company employees repeatedly qualify a comment about the centrality of "history" or "fact" with a reference to the light-heartedness of their performances: "the history is important to us. It's just we are presenting it in a fairly light-hearted way," or: "There's a lot of factual information, a lot of historical information, but it's ... presented quite light-heartedly" (Baxter, interview; Pirie).

Such statements contain a tacit acknowledgement that a light-hearted performance style may occasionally compromise the accuracy of the tours' historical content. David makes this point clearly: "we say in our introduction [to each tour], 'Everything we say is based on fact, it's true,' and I think there is a definite integrity in that, which is important. But at the end of the day it's entertainment and that's why people pay" (Martin, interview). Ultimately, then, as David states, the "information" or historical "truth" presented on the company's tours "becomes secondary ... to the manner in which it's delivered": "The humour is a way of making people more receptive to the information. It's a way of making it more memorable and a way of getting a point home. But it [the humour] takes over, after a while" (emphasis added).

In fact, the emphasis placed by the company's employees on the style rather than the informational content of their performances occasionally leads to explicit justifications of the inaccurate and inauthentic on their tours. While it is important to him that the company's tours incorporate an element of historical accuracy, David states that

"I also like the fact that we've used stories ... that've been completely made up." He

offers the example of a story which "we used to do ... about a guy called Angus Roy,

which was quite fictional," commenting that "it's completely – we made it up" (Martin,

interview). Cameron also mentions this particular story, describing how:

> what with the power of mythology, we just created this story ... [out] of nothing. And we found, years later, that it had been printed in guidebooks, guidebooks had actually presented this story. So I guess that shows you just – stories handed down to [sic] generations, or just [over] a number of years. And we've got no power – well, we gave it the power, but then someone else has gone on and you can see it becomes changed and manipulated over time. ... Things are always manipulated and changed according to who's telling the story. (Pirie)[8]

Thus both Cameron and David believe that "there's a limit" to the importance of

historical accuracy or authenticity in the context of the ghost tour performance. As David

comments: "Certain elements don't actually matter – whether they're absolutely

accurate... I think it's important that [the tours are] based on reality, but you don't have

to be slaves to it" (Martin, interview). Indeed, the justification which Cameron offers for

the company's alleged fabrication of the "Angus Roy" story demonstrates a distinctly

postmodern incredulity towards meta-narratives and a playful manipulation of "the power

of mythology." His suggestion that "[t]hings are always manipulated and changed

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[8] However, Lorna states that "a lady from [the Scottish Society for Psychical Research] ... talks about one of the ghosts we used to talk about on the tour [i.e., Angus Roy]... And she said, as a child, she witnessed the ghost" (Baxter, interview). When I later asked her to clarify the origins of the Angus Roy story in light of the comments made by David and Cameron, Lorna maintained that Roy's ghost was traditionally reputed to haunt Victoria Terrace, the location where the story was performed on the company's tours (conversation). I was thus unable to verify with Witchery's management David's and Cameron's claims that the story had been "made up" by the company. An example of a "guidebook" which uses the Angus Roy story is Lily Seafield's Scottish Ghosts (1999).

according to who's telling the story" effectively refutes the concept of "true history" or "total authenticity." In a similar way, Robin Mitchell justifies the light-hearted presentation of history on the company's tours with the remark that "history is so imprecise anyway" (quoted in Mathers 24). Such comments reflect the way in which, under the conditions of postmodernity, "everything becomes discourse, and there is no transcendental signified – no universal, stable center" (Thomas 115). The effects of these conditions are clearly evident in Witchery's post-touristic concern with the enjoyability of the surface or style of the performance, over and above the "reality" or "authenticity" of its content.

This post-touristic ambivalence towards historical accuracy and authenticity within the Witchery Tours discourse is encapsulated in a statement made on the flier used to advertise the company's tours. There potential audience members are told: "Your ghostly guide will blend history with humour and facts with fables." The alliteration creates a playful equivalence between the "history" and the "humour," the "facts" and the "fables," deconstructing the hierarchical dichotomy implied in each pairing by containing both terms within the ceaseless play of signs. As Lorna states: "The history's probably more important than the humour, I would say, but – well, maybe not!" (Baxter, interview). The "blend" of "history with humour and facts with fables" presented on the company's tours exemplifies the "nivellating tendency" of the postmodern touristic ethos, which works to "reduce or suspend the saliency of the boundaries between … fact and fiction, reality, reconstruction and fantasy," enabling all to "co-exist within the same complex … on an equal standing" (Cohen, "Contemporary" 22, 16). As the audience of

one "Murder & Mystery Tour" is told: "Everything you hear on the tour is based on fact. <u>Pretty much</u>. We get all our stories from reliable sources, things like city records, library records, the <u>Daily Record</u>, Britney Spears records," and so on (Martin, tour, emphasis in original).

Significantly, Lorna comments that the company's guides rely on their audience members' ability to distinguish between what is "fact" and what is "fable" in the context of their tours and on their willingness to accept that not everything that they hear on the tours is strictly "true." As she states: "Basically, the majority of the tour is factual, although [there] is that slightly theatrical angle on it. ... I think it just gives a nice mix. And I think people are quite aware what is for real and what is fable" (Baxter, interview). In this way, as Tellervo Kauppi suggests in her work on ghost tour performances, "the listeners' sense of fact and fiction is being trusted," with "different states of 'fact' and 'fiction' [being] indicated" to audience members through the use of a variety of performance techniques, such as the choice between "a theatrical manner or a style that is closer to everyday speech" (15). The predominantly "theatrical manner" of Witchery's tours, then, clearly signals to audience members that they are not intended to be taken entirely seriously, but rather should be accepted in a spirit of light-heartedness. As Keith comments: "some people might groan because they think [the tours are] a bit silly and they want something a bit more serious." However, "you basically say to the people that 'we're not taking this too seriously; ... relax and have a laugh and take as much history as you want'" (K. Smith, interview).

The company's guides also acknowledge that while some audiences may indeed prefer a more factual, historically-based tour, others may be less concerned with history or factual accuracy and therefore prefer a tour conducted in a more humorous style. As a result, the guides express a willingness to adapt their performance styles to meet the needs of each individual audience, rather than devoting themselves rigidly to "accuracy" on the one hand or to "entertainment" on the other. Richard, for example, comments that:

> my style can change depending on what group I've got. ... I guess it's something I've learnt ... through experience, because you get groups ... who want a very historical, straight tour and they don't want to hear jokes because it detracts ... from the history of it, they seem to think. And so if I think that's the kind of group that I've got, then ... I'll do a very straight, historical [tour] with very little jokes and what-have-you in it. If I've got a young people's group or a hen night or a work's group, who are obviously out for a drink and a laugh, and they're purely on the tour for entertainment, then I'll be obviously a lot more jokey and come across a lot more casual, rather than historical. Although it's virtually the same information you're presenting, the way you're presenting it makes a big difference. (Norman, interview)[9]

Significantly, however, Richard adds that "[t]he [style] that I'm most comfortable with is the jokey one, I prefer to do tours in that sort of way. Because ... in my personal opinion, these tours are for entertainment." In contrast to the findings of Holloway's study, then, it is clear from descriptions of their performances that this particular group of tour guides

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[9] Like Richard, other company employees also repeatedly stress the importance of "gauging the audience" during the opening minutes of each tour and adapting their performance styles accordingly. As Keith puts it, "You have to really feel what kind of group it is, to see how they would enjoy it, ... because some groups just like the facts and stuff and other groups ... love the smut and ... the really corny humour" (K. Smith, interview). Similarly, Cameron states that "you have to play [it] by ear. Sometimes you've got groups that want more history... Some groups, you know early on that they're really up for being involved, oohing and aahing, and screaming and shouting" (Pirie).

ascribes much greater priority to their role as "entertainers" than as "information-givers,"

adding further weight to the interpretation of Witchery's tours as an expression of an

emerging postmodern touristic ethos.

## "costumed ghouls": Light-heartedness and the actor identity

A second broad meaning of light-heartedness within the Witchery Tours discourse

relates to the theatricality of the company's performances and in particular to its espousal

of what Snow calls "the actor identity" (133). In striking contrast to the importance

ascribed within the Mercat Tours discourse to the practice of conducting tours "as

oneself," Witchery proudly advertises the fact that its tours are "presented by costumed

guides (summoned from the spirit world)" (http://www.witcherytours.com/). The

company's "Murder & Mystery Tour" is led by "Adam Lyal (deceased)" (see Figure 3.1),

a character based on an actual historical figure who "was executed ... on March 27 1811,

for the small crime of highway robbery." Its "Ghosts & Gore Tour," meanwhile, is led

by "Alexander Clapperton," also "deceased" (see Figure 3.2), "a cemetery director in

Edinburgh in the [first] half of the nineteenth century" (K. Smith, tour; Thompson, tour).

Each of the company's tours also features a "jumper-ooter" who "provide[s] guaranteed

ghastly appearances," accosting the tour party unexpectedly several times during the

Figure 3.1. Adam Lyal (deceased), tour guide, Witchery "Murder & Mystery Tour."

Figure 3.2. Alexander Clapperton (deceased), tour guide, Witchery "Ghosts & Gore Tour."

course of the performance, each time adopting a different "ghostly" persona (Witchery Tours, flier; see Figures 3.4-3.5, 3.8-3.10).[10]

In addition to such "costumed ghouls" (http://www.witcherytours.com/), the company also makes extensive use of theatrical "props" and "gimmicks" on its tours (Pirie), including a plastic rat used to illustrate a story about the plague; a variety of plastic body-parts; a bucket of water thrown over audience members to illustrate primitive local waste disposal methods; and torture implements such as thumbscrews and a mobile pillory which are demonstrated on "volunteers" chosen from the audience.[11] Such features clearly mark the company's tours as an instance of the second of Peter Elson's two types of ghost tour performance outlined in the last chapter, that of "theatrical walks with 'jump-outs' involving fake ghouls and props" (n.p.).

The "celebrat[ion of] fictive and dramaturgical values" is a key characteristic of the postmodern touristic ethos and is closely linked to post-tourism's "concern with the enjoyability of the surface appearance ... rather than [the] 'reality' or 'authenticity'" of

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[10] Like the light-heartedness of the company's performance aesthetic as a whole, the use of theatrical personae on its tours was a conscious development which is traceable to a particular moment in its history. Robin explains that when he and cofounder Colin MacPhail first started conducting the tours in 1985, "it was just ourselves as guides." He goes on to describe how, some time later, "we came up with this idea of having characters appearing on the tour." He explains: "Colin didn't have much to do that night and decided to get a mask and an old coat and come out ... and see what happened. And sure enough he jumped out one place, the reaction was phenomenal and we thought, 'Right, we really need to build on this'" (Mitchell, quoted in Mathers 18-9).

[11] We may compare this positive usage of the word "gimmick" to its negative association within the discourses of "straight" ghost tour companies such as Mercat, in which context it is typically used to connote deception, fabrication and fakery (see Chapter Two).

the performance (Rojek 134; Cohen, "Contemporary" 22). Certainly, Witchery exhibits

none of the ambivalence displayed by Mercat and other "straight" ghost tour companies

towards the actor identity or their concerns that "to be acting is to be faking" (Snow 133).

Significantly, however, the positive attitudes expressed within the company's discourse

towards the theatricality of the ghost tour performance are based less on a belief that

acting is not faking than that it doesn't really matter if it is. Lorna, for example, openly

acknowledges that Adam Lyal is "not quite how a highway robber would've looked in

these days" and that the costumes worn by the jumper-outer "aren't completely

authentic." In fact, like the "admittedly and overtly staged" attractions referred to by

Cohen, the inauthenticity of the characters who feature on the company's tours "is so

easily recognizable, that one has to assume that tourists must be inordinately stupid or

naïve to accept them seriously as authentic" ("Contemporary" 18; "Play" 292).

Lyal, for example, is an unashamedly stereotypical "ashen-faced phantom" with

slicked-back hair, black cape and white gloves. In Cameron's words, he looks "a bit like

[a character from] a Hammer Horror [or] a Dracula movie." Similarly, Lorna comments

of Lyal that "he does look very Dracula-esque" (Pirie; Baxter, interview). Robin explains

how, in the process of researching the character, "we thought, 'Well, what would Adam

Lyal look like?'" and how "[w]e had no ideas, so we went down the stereotypical view

[sic] of a white faced phantom because we thought that might be quite a good marketing

ploy" (Mitchell, quoted in Mathers 19). Robin's description illustrates the way in which

the company's post-touristic ethos is characterised by a marked lack of concern for the

"authenticity" of its characters as compared to their need, within a competitive touristic

marketplace, to have "a certain look to [them]," to appear "distinctive" (Baxter, interview). As Chris Rojek comments: "Since authenticity is no longer an issue under postmodernism, it is reasonable to expect that [post-touristic] forms would be preoccupied with spectacle and sensation" (134). As the case of Adam Lyal demonstrates, then, the unashamed theatricality of Witchery's performances is illustrative of an emphasis on "visual spectacle and play" which is widely associated with postmodern culture (Urry 84) and which stands in marked contrast to the serious quest for authenticity which informs the discourses of straight ghost tour companies such as Mercat.[12]

Indeed, the contrast between the performance aesthetics of the two companies closely reflects the opposition between "linear, literary" and "visual, figurative" sensibility which Narváez identifies as one facet of the relationship between modern and postmodern aesthetic practice (173). As discussed in the previous chapter, at the heart of Mercat's ambivalence towards the adoption of the actor identity and other theatrical performance techniques is its fundamental logocentric belief in "the power of word to create the atmosphere" and to "get the imagination engaged into a story" (McBrierty, interview; Humphreys, interview). Conversely, Witchery's light-hearted, postmodern

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[12] Significantly, Urry suggests that "[b]ecause of the importance of the visual, of the gaze, tourism has always been concerned with spectacle and with cultural practices which partly implode into each other. Much tourist activity has been thoroughly anti-auratic. It has been based on mechanical and electronic reproduction...; it has been thoroughly based on popular pleasures, on an anti-elitism with little separation of art from social life; it has typically involved not contemplation but high levels of audience participation; and there has been much emphasis on pastiche, or what others might call kitsch" (86).

performance aesthetic is based on a perception that "the stories" alone are not enough to constitute an effective ghost tour performance and on a corresponding emphasis on the "entertainment value" (Norman, interview) of the theatrical techniques so explicitly rejected within the rhetoric of the former company.

This aesthetic is encapsulated in Keith's perception that "[i]t's so easy just to have someone to take you round and tell you stories," but that the use of theatrical personae "brings in another dimension to the tour," providing the key to the success of the performance by allowing both performers and audience to "have a good laugh and not [be] serious, just have a laugh at yourselves" (K. Smith, interview). Again, such attitudes reflect a preoccupation with the surface style rather than the content of the performance. Thus, whereas Mercat's employees regard the use of theatrical personae as "detracting from the actual stories that we're telling" (McBrierty, interview), Witchery tour guide Robin Bankhead feels that the same practice "gives [the audience] something to really remember about the tour." As he comments: "it's quite possible that somebody … won't remember any of the content, but they'll remember this guy [i.e., the character who leads the tour]… [T]hat's what people remember is people" (interview).[13]

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[13] Similarly, whereas employees of most straight ghost tour companies typically perceive conducting tours "in character" to impact negatively on the guide's ability to "relate to" and "interact with" the audience, Richard believes that the adoption of theatrical personae actually "helps the [audience] to get into it, to participate a lot more from the beginning." As he states: "if they've a question to ask, … I think that people would approach a character a lot more readily than they would approach a historian. …. So I think it's quite important to be in character, not only for the entertainment value, … but also because they're much more approachable" (Norman, interview).

A similar contrast in the emphasis of the two companies is evidenced in the differing attitudes expressed by their employees towards the role of the jumper-outer. As indicated in the previous chapter, the jumper-outer is typically regarded by employees of straight ghost tour companies as the ultimate manifestation of the fakery inherent in the inauthentic ghost tour performance. Thus the stated aim of Mercat's tours is to "try and bring these stories back to life so that people don't need someone dressed up jumping out, because the stories work in their own right" (Stewart, quoted in Mathers 11). In stark contrast, Witchery's employees attribute considerable significance to the role of the jumper-outer in the overall success of the company's performances. David goes so far as to suggest that the "jumping out" is "the most important part of the tour" and both he and Robin Mitchell assert that "[there's] ... an art in jumping out," attributing a high degree of skill to the effective fulfilment of the role (Martin, interview; Mitchell, quoted in Mathers 21).[14] The ascription of such significance to the role of the jumper-outer, consisting as it does of "pure" spectacle in the absence of any redeeming informational content, provides a particularly strong indication of a postmodernistic emphasis on "visual spectacle and play" at work in the context of Witchery's performances.

In fact, the postmodern hegemony of the image permeates the company's discourse at a number of levels and its performance aesthetic is informed by several

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[14] As Robin states, "People think, 'Oh, jumping out, that must be easy, you just jump out, do you?' But ... [there's] actually an art in jumping out.... [W]e've one guy in particular who's been with us for quite a few years, and he's made it an art. He just comes out at exactly the right time, does exactly the right things; he adapts to who the group are and what they want. He can tune in on who's actually [on] the tour" (Mitchell, quoted in Mathers 21).

rhetorical techniques which can be characterised as predominantly "visual" (cf. Dorst 120). Specifically, it exemplifies "the well-known postmodernistic practice of pastiche, an aesthetic and image-making mode manifesting 'a new free play of styles and historicist allusions'" (Warshaver 224, quoting Frederic Jameson). A flier advertising the availability of the company's guides for "Special Appearances" at clients' venues and events, for example, reads that: "Our gory characters range from a werewolf to a witch, from a wild Highlander to a giant Rat, and from a blue gowned beggar to the Angel of Death" (Witchery Tours, "Special"; see Figures 3.3-3.4). Like the flier advertising the "blend" of "history with humour and facts with fables" presented on the company's tours, the structure of this statement itself enacts the playful "nivellating tendency" which informs the selection and combination of the "costumed ghouls" who feature in Witchery's performances. It reflects the way in which, within the performance space created on the company's tours, the histories and identities of its characters are flattened into the play of images on a surface, producing a series of visually striking but essentially "meaningless" juxtapositions.

This process clearly conforms to Robert Hewison's description of collage ("the post-modernist format") as "an assembly of fragments without ruling pattern or perspective," in which "[n]arrative is deliberately broken or disrupted, special relations are subjected to chance, and a self-referring consciousness of medium is all. Without perspective," as Hewison writes, "it becomes an art of surface, of appearance, not content" (Heritage 133). Rather than illustrating the development of any particular historical narrative, then, the choice of characters featured on Witchery's tours appears to

Figure 3.3. "…from a werewolf to a witch…": Agnes Fynnie, witch ("Murder & Mystery" and "Ghosts & Gore" tours). Fynnie was convicted of witchcraft and executed in 1644 (see Black 184; P. Brown 134; Larner et al. 13, 243; Maidment 53-6; Sharpe 113-9).

Figure 3.4. "…and from a blue gowned beggar to the Angel of Death": William Bain, the Blue-Gowned Beggar ("Ghosts & Gore Tour"). The "Bluegowns" were a society of bedesmen or licensed beggars which existed in Scotland from the thirteenth- until the nineteenth century and whose function was "to pray for the souls of the King's ancestors and successors" (see Watt 242-3; D. Wilson 243-4).

have been governed entirely by chance.  Indeed, the flier confirms that "[t]he costumed ghouls can be chosen to suit the occasion."  Thus, as John Dorst states of collage, the performance space created on the company's tours "is the sort of surface that reduces all reality to a set of equivalent images, with any given image subject to infinite reproduction or substitution" (105) – a surface that renders a "giant Rat" equivalent to and endlessly substitutable for a "wild Highlander," a "werewolf" and/or "the Angel of Death."  The resultant discourse is also characterised by its infinite self-referentiality.  The "meaning" or "point" of the discourse lies in the nivellating play of images itself, thereby exemplifying post-tourism's "aesthetic enjoyment of surfaces" for their own sake, "whatever their cognitive status may be" (Cohen, "Contemporary" 21).

The same pastiche or collage aesthetic can also be seen at work in the characterisation of the individual characters who feature on the company's tours.  The Foule Clenger who appears with Lyal at the start of the "Murder & Mystery Tour," for example, was, the audience is told, originally employed to collect the bodies of Edinburgh's plague victims.  However, since "there aren't really very many plague victims anymore," he has been "retrained" to "collect your hard-earned cash" (the ticket money for the tour) and is later employed as a "road safety officer" complete with "Stop: Tour Crossing" sign to help the audience cross the road to their next stop (Martin, tour).  The Foule Clenger encapsulates the way in which Witchery constructs its "ghosts" out of the playfully recombined fragments of a variety of written and visual texts, from the historical records in which its characters were researched, to the discourses of contemporary popular culture.  As Lyal comments of the Clenger: "He does look like an

extra out of Star Wars" (K. Smith, tour; see Figure 3.5). The company's "costumed

ghouls" thus enact the "flatness or depthlessness" of the postmodern "world of pastiche,"

"a culture of images and surfaces ... [which] derives its hermeneutic force from other

images, other surfaces, the interplay of intertextuality," in which "[r]ather than original

cultural production, we have cultural production born out of cultural production" (Storey

185; see Figure 3.6).

The (inter)textual status of Witchery's characters can also clearly be seen in the

characterisation of Adam Lyal himself. Robin Mitchell's description of the process by

which Lyal was chosen as the character to lead the "Murder & Mystery Tour" reveals his

status as quite literally a randomly selected textual fragment:

> We needed a character to lead the tour, so ... we went down this large list
> [of public executions] and ... we're looking for a name that's just a little
> different, and sure enough we came across Adam Lyal. It had a certain
> ring about it, and we thought, 'Oh, that's a good character.' .... [S]o we
> chose Adam Lyal. (quoted in Mathers 19)

As Robin's description indicates, the identity of the historical Lyal was thus almost

entirely incidental to the choice of "Adam Lyal" as the character to lead the company's

tours. All that mattered was that his name "had a certain ring about it."[15] *In* fact, then, to

say that "Adam Lyal" the character is based on the historical Lyal is a misinterpretation

since it implies a hierarchical relationship in which one Lyal is prior to and thus more

"real" than the other and might therefore be used as a standard against which to measure

the other's "authenticity."

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[15] Although the company has subsequently conducted a considerable amount of
research into the life of the historical Lyal (e.g., see Baxter, interview), this information is
nonetheless largely irrelevant to the guides' discourse on the tours themselves.

Figure 3.5. "like an extra out of <u>Star Wars</u>": the Foule Clenger ("Murder & Mystery" and "Ghosts & Gore" tours). On the historical <u>clengers</u>, see Scottish Burgh Records Society 253-4; Shrewsbury 208.

Figure 3.6. "a depthless world": Witchery Tours' costume and props store.

However, as Dorst points out, "The so-called depth models that distinguish between authentic and inauthentic cease to make sense in the postmodern context," rendering meaningless any attempt to differentiate "between substance and simulacrum, original and copy, depth and surface" (110-1). The character of "Adam Lyal" is thus not merely a secondary representation of the historical or "real" Lyal; rather, the "representation is the real" (Rojek 132; cf. Storey 181). Indeed, Cameron hints at the way in which the representation has become "more real than the real itself" (Storey 178) when he comments: "you wonder what [he]'d make of it. ... Adam Lyal was just a highwayman, you know? He was insignificant and now thousands of people have heard of him. [He's] quite well famous, since his demise" (Pirie).

Thus Witchery's espousal of the actor identity illustrates the way in which the playfulness of postmodern tourism involves the "destructuring [of] the boundaries between the copy and the original, or between sign and reality" (Wang 54). The character of Lyal, in particular, exemplifies the characteristic postmodern mode of hyperrealism, whereby "the distinction between simulation and the 'real' implodes" so that "the 'real' and the imaginary continually collapse into each other" and "are experienced as without difference" (Storey 178). Lorna comments, for example, that "people quite often think that this Adam Lyal is a real person." She describes how "[p]eople phone up and ask to speak to Adam Lyal" and how "[w]e don't ever tell them that there's about half a dozen Adam Lyals in on an evening. ... [W]e keep it going, we say, 'Oh, he's not available, can I help you?' that kind of thing" (Baxter, interview; cf. Storey 178). In fact, there are a number of ways in which the company similarly

encourages and perpetuates the collapse of the real and the imaginary with respect to the personage of Adam Lyal. The book which audience members receive as part of the ticket money for their tour, entitled <u>Adam Lyal's Witchery Tales</u> (see Figure 3.7), is not only narrated but also ostensibly authored by Lyal himself, even although several of the stories it contains depict events which took place after the historical Lyal's death. Both he and Alexander Clapperton also have their own business cards (see Figure 3.8) which are distributed to audience members at the end of each tour, with instructions that the characters can be contacted "in the spirit world" by phone, fax, e-mail or through "our spirit world wide web site" (Thompson, tour).

Together with several of the other characters who feature on the company's tours, Lyal has also participated in a wide range of publicity stunts for local and national media, including publicly donating blood for charity, narrating ghost stories on national radio at Halloween and even participating as a contestant in TV game shows such as the BBC's <u>Style Challenge</u> and <u>Ready, Steady, Cook!</u> (Baxter, "Business" 5-6; interview). The most dramatic instance of this form of hyperrealism within the company's discourse, however, occurred in May 1999, when Robin Mitchell, "standing in the guise of Adam Lyal," stood as a candidate for the Scottish parliamentary elections, coming "a remarkable 9$^{th}$ out of 17 parties registered on the Lothians list," with a total of 1,184 votes (Baxter, "Business" 6). "Lyal's" policies included "a campaign to reduce MSPs' salaries from £40,000 a year to £3.60 an hour" (the then minimum wage) and "a pledge to wear white makeup for the full term of the Parliament" (http://www.witcherytours.com/). Explaining
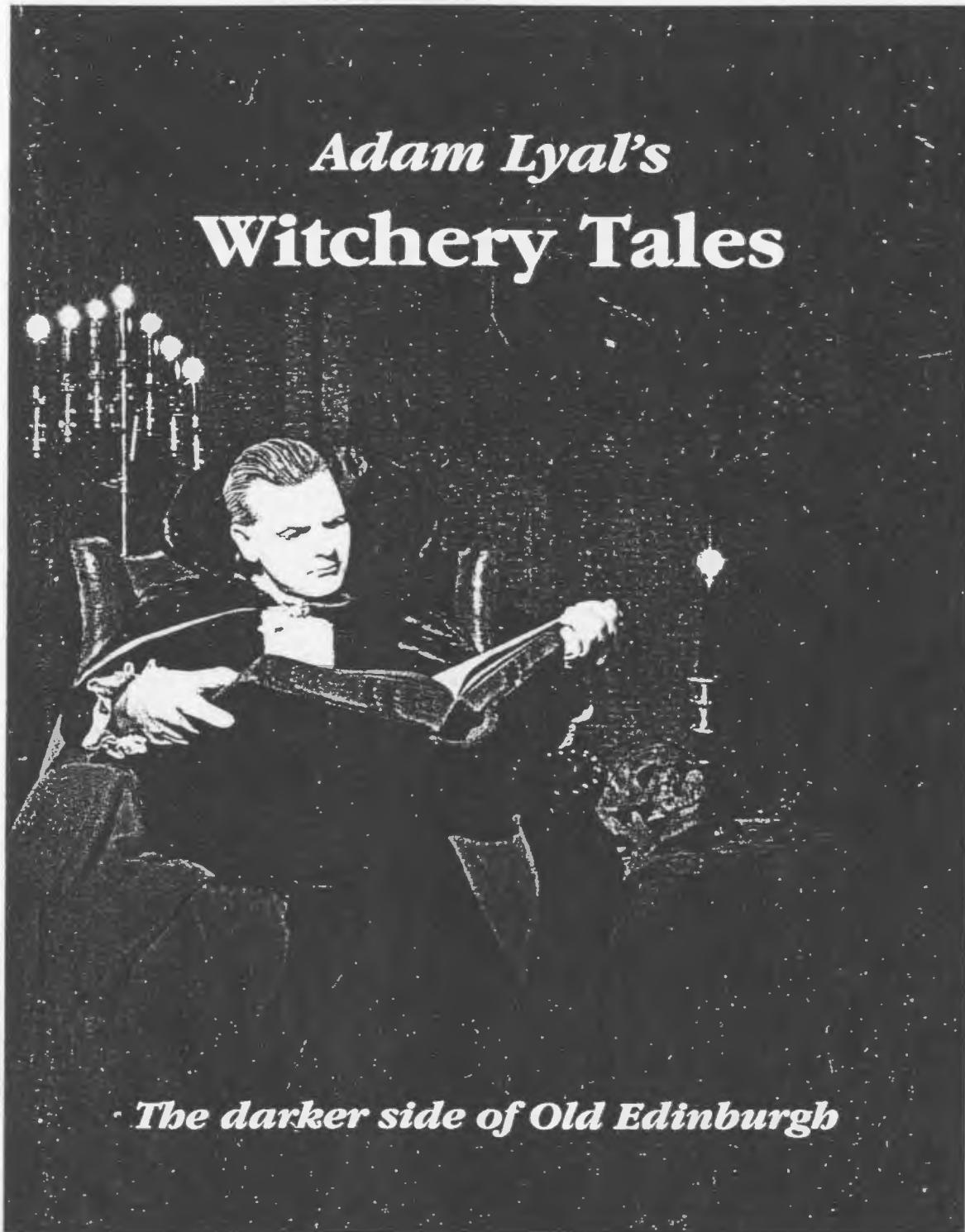
Figure 3.7. Cover of <u>Adam Lyal's Witchery Tales</u>, a copy of which is included in the price of each Witchery tour. The book is narrated and ostensibly authored by Lyal himself.

## Adam Lyal
## (Deceased)

The Witchery Murder & Mystery Tour
352 Castlehill, Royal Mile, Edinburgh EH1 2NF, Scotland
Telephone (0131) 225 6745  Fax (0131) 220 2086
Website: www.witcherytours.com
e-mail: lyal@witcherytours.demon.co.uk

## Alexr. Clapperton - Deceased
## Cemetery Director

The Witchery Ghosts & Gore Tour
352 Castlehill, Royal Mile, Edinburgh EH1 2NF
Tel (0131) 225 6745  Fax (0131) 220 2086
www.witcherytours.com
lyal@witcherytours.demon.co.uk

Figure 3.8.  Business cards of Adam Lyal and Alexander Clapperton.

the company's reasons for running Lyal as an electoral candidate, Lorna states, without apparent irony: "We just thought it would be nice to be part of history, a good chance to actually be there <u>when history was being created</u>" (Baxter, interview, emphasis added; see Figure 3.9).

The destructuring of the boundaries between sign and reality within the Witchery Tours discourse can also be seen at work in the context of the company's tours themselves. The performance space created on the tours can be interpreted as an instance of the "visual rhetoric" that Dorst calls "postmodern vignette": "a fully self-contained world of signifying practice which recognizes no outside," "within which a self-sustaining play and exchange of images can take place" (119, 123). According to Dorst, the "salient feature of [vignette] ... is the undecidability of the relationship between inscription (image) and inscribed surface" (119). In the case of Witchery's tours, this undecidability is the result primarily of the effacement of "the theoretical distinction that is sometimes characterized as discourse space vs. story space" (125), a process which is particularly evident in the following extract, taken from an exchange between Lyal and the final jumper-outer on the "Murder & Mystery Tour," the Mad Monk of the Cowgate (see Figure 3.10):

> AL:[16] [Humouring him.] Very good, Monk. You're not very scary
> tonight. [Laughter from audience.] Is it because it's Sunday?
> Have you been doing your meditating tonight?
> MM: [Muffled, inaudible.]
> AL: [Translating.] He's hung-over tonight. [Laughter.] .... [To Monk.]
> You're not a very authentic monk. I mean, where's your sandals?

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[16] AL = Adam Lyal (Keith Smith); MM = Mad Monk (performer unknown); G = Monk's "girlfriend."

> Why're you wearing desert boots?  [Laughter.]  And football socks?
> MM: [Inaudible.]
> AL: It's cold?! And I thought you were meant to be, you know, really frightening?  And you're in the wrong place.  You're supposed to be down in the Cowgate, you're up in Barrie's Close.  [To audience.]  I think he's just lost it tonight!  [To Monk.]  This is actually, you know, a private group.  I've been with them for the last hour or so and you've just suddenly joined on.
> MM: [Inaudible.]
> AL: You phoned up?
> MM: [Inaudible.]
> AL: You've booked?  Have you come with someone?
> MM: [Inaudible.]
> AL: Well, can you show me, then?
> MM: [Inaudible.]
> AL: Can you show me who you've come with, then?
> MM: [Makes his way around the audience, making a show of searching for someone and eventually selecting a young woman.]
> AL: And who's this, Monk?
> MM: [Becoming more coherent.]  My girlfriend.
> AL: Your girlfriend?!  [Laughter.]  Really?  [To the woman.]  Do you take responsibility for the Monk?
> G: Yes, I do.  [Laughter.]
> AL: You do?!
> MM: Oh, yes!
> AL: Well done, Monk!
> MM: [To woman.]  Come on, let's kiss with tongues.
> AL: Monk!  That's disgusting! … You're just lowering the tone of the tour.  Just clear off.
> MM: [Mopes away, to cries of sympathy from the audience.]  (K. Smith, tour)

The above extract clearly illustrates the way in which the peculiarly postmodern performance space created on Witchery's tours operates by "bind[ing] spectators neither into story nor into discourse, but into a ceaseless play between these levels" (Dorst 125). Thus the character of Adam Lyal steps outside of story space in order to comment directly on the "inauthenticity" of the character of the Mad Monk and later to accuse him of gate-crashing the tour itself, while the Monk responds by protesting that he has

Figure 3.9. "more real than the real itself": an election communication for "Adam Lyal's" second attempt to win a seat in the Scottish Parliament in May 2003.

Figure 3.10. "not a very authentic monk": the Mad Monk of the Cowgate ("Murder & Mystery" and "Ghosts & Gore" tours).

"phoned up" and booked his place. Variations in the above scene on other "Murder & Mystery Tours" I attended demonstrate the extent to which the humour of such episodes depends on similarly playful (and often purposely ridiculous) "violations of the boundary between discourse and story" (Dorst 125). On one tour, for example, when asked, "What happened to the sandals?" the Monk explains that he has "exploded them in the microwave," to which Lyal responds by informing him: "that's coming out of your wages" (Bankhead, tour). On another occasion, Lyal comments of the Monk to the audience: "Three years of drama college and that's the best you get, isn't that shocking? His mother thinks he's a lawyer" (Martin, tour).

The obvious humour which the audience enjoys in such scenes is primarily the result of the "alienation effect" created by "[t]he contrast of the historical role with the contemporary reality of the performer" (Snow 147). As Snow argues of the performance at Plimoth Plantation, the audience's "awareness of the double identity" of the performer, of "witnessing a twentieth-century individual's attempt to embody a seventeenth-century persona," produces "a unique and pleasurable aesthetic experience." Of the interpreters at the site, Snow observes that "[o]n many levels, it is their play in between identities that makes this performance so fascinating," arguing that "[t]he playful and serious collision of two worlds gives this historical re-creation its special dynamic" (147-8). As at Plimoth Plantation, the audience's awareness of the "double identity" of the performers on Witchery's tours is heightened and encouraged by the fact that "the actor never completely transforms into the character but frequently lets the audience know that he or she is not the character and that the performance is, indeed, not real life, but a play"

(147). The effect is "to disallow the audience's suspension of disbelief" by focusing their attention instead on the ceaseless interplay between discourse and story until this interplay becomes the "point" of the discourse itself. In this way, Witchery's "costumed ghouls" enact "the fundamental change in the nature of subjectivity, indeed, the very dispersal of the subject as previously constituted," which is brought about as part of the "postmodern transformation" (Dorst 124). Its characters "[move] freely between [story and discourse space], thereby implicitly calling into question the very status of subjectivity." In each instance, as Dorst argues, "A seemingly unified subject has slipped across and thereby blurred some fundamental boundary and thus enacted a vignetting of subjectivity itself" (125).

## Plastic rats: Light-heartedness and the postmodern thrill

The above discussion highlights an important distinction between the type of play discussed earlier in the context of recreational tourism and that of postmodern- or post-tourism. Snow's description of the playful "suspension of disbelief" involved in encounters between interpreters and visitors at Plimoth Plantation accords with Cohen's interpretation of recreational tourism as a "play at reality." However, Snow goes on to show how the very nature of the performance presented at the site makes such a suspension of disbelief often difficult to sustain. Developing the theatrical analogy, he suggests that, on the one hand, "The Pilgrim Village resembles naturalistic theatre in providing a delightful illusion for those who are willing to suspend their disbelief. On the

other hand," however, "there is a component of Brechtian theatre" to the performance at Plimoth Plantation "because the illusion is constantly being broken ... by the presence of contemporary artifacts such as radios, tape recorders, and video cameras, as well as by the audience itself" (207-8). It is for this reason that participants in living history and other touristic activities characterised by high levels of concern for authenticity take particular pains to remove from their performances any trace of such "contemporary artifacts" whose presence might jeopardise their authenticity.

The living history reenactors interviewed by Richard Handler and William Saxton, for example, complained of the fact that they "found it difficult to find reenactment settings free of 'anachronisms,' such as airplanes overhead" and members of their audiences themselves (244). Similarly, Fife describes how reenactors involved in the celebrations held to mark "one thousand years since the Norse landed at ... L'Anse aux Meadows" on Newfoundland's Great Northern Peninsula were "upset at the way Norstead [a reconstructed Viking village near the site] had been disturbed by the cameras, trucks and broadcasting gear that was very visibly scattered throughout the heart of the site" (2, 14). Fife quotes one reenactor who complained that: "It's a joke. ... [O]ur rules say that we can't have something like a coke can in our hands while dressed like this [gestures to himself and his warrior outfit], but they park a bloody great semi-trailer right in the middle of camp!" Another reenactor "insisted on creating a small area in one part of the village site for the fighting to take place: 'Where at least people can take pictures of us ... that won't have any trucks or boom mikes in them'" (14).

Significantly, however, in the case of Plimoth Plantation, Snow argues that "the juxtaposition of the illusory past with a very real present ... creates a special kind of postmodern thrill in this environmental theatre" (207-8, emphasis added). He suggests that "most visitors ... expect to be able to switch back and forth among channels easily, to experience a rapid transformation of frames, to enjoy an interplay of contradictory categories" (192). He refers specifically to the interplay between seventeenth-century Pilgrim life as it is "re-created" at the site and the elements of contemporary, twentieth-century life which continually intrude upon the recreated environment. This expectation exemplifies Urry's observation that, in the context of post-tourism, "There is much less of a sense of the authentic, the once-in-a-lifetime gaze, and much more of the endless availability of gazes through a frame at the flick of a switch" (100). Indeed, Snow states that the "simultaneous cognition of contradictory categories" experienced by visitors to Plimoth Plantation "is in essence the pleasure of postmodern consciousness," going so far as to suggest that at least some visitors to the site "have become more fascinated with the interplay of contradictory categories than with the narrative delineation of Pilgrim history" itself (193).

Thus, in contrast to recreational tourism, in postmodern tourism there is often little or no attempt to maintain the playful pretence that what is being experienced is "real"; indeed, as we saw above, post-tourism often actively disallows the suspension of disbelief through its constant "foregrounding of the plane of discourse" (Dorst 125), focusing its audiences' attention on the surface or style of the performance itself rather than on its content. Whereas recreational tourism "as play" depends on a willingness to

"give oneself up to the performance" (Cohen, "Play" 298), the playfulness of post-tourism lies in a conscious appreciation on the part of both performer and audience of the ironies and inauthenticities inherent in the performance situation itself. As Ritzer and Liska state, participants in postmodern tourism "play at and with touring" (102).

For example, Snow describes how, in the case of Plimoth Plantation:

> at times (not infrequently), both parties [interpreters and visitors], either seeking a different kind of pleasure or out of sheer perversity, break the rules or attempt to interfere with the established code of good form. On these occasions, when the delicate membrane of the illusion created by the willing suspension of disbelief is damaged, very different kinds of relationships develop between the ethnohistorical role-player and the audience. (171)

Specifically, Snow discusses the practice of what he calls "Pilgrim-baiting" at the site, whereby "[m]any visitors, especially teenagers, deliberately endeavor to break the illusion of seventeenth-century life" or "to make the actor/historian break out of character." This they do "by asking questions about television, video cassettes, or rock stars, or by pointing out the airplanes that occasionally fly overhead, or by calling attention to the fire extinguisher that is necessarily concealed in every Pilgrim house." Significantly, Snow states that "[t]his is all part of the play – the game – of the village" (218-9n). In a similar way, he describes how the performers themselves "give indications to the audience that they … are aware of the play frame" by making what he calls "alienating gestures." Behind the scenes of the performance itself, they also engage in "many types of offstage humor and satire" in which Pilgrim values and norms become subject to "symbolic inversion" (181, 118, 150-1).

In their study of the Colonial Williamsburg living history site in Virginia, meanwhile, Richard Handler and Eric Gable describe how although an official policy of "no anachronisms" operates at the site ("'The rules say you can't show anything twentieth-century... That means no television antennas ... no Christmas lights'"), in practice "every interpreter spent ... time calling [visitors'] attention to what the [Colonial Williamsburg] foundation was effectively disguising – to anachronisms we might not have noticed on our own" (56-7). Thus:

> interpreters told us that garages were made to look like stables, central air-conditioning was allowed because it did not have to be visible, and garbage cans could be hidden behind hedges. When we came across these artfully disguised elements, they were pointed out to us. ... [W]e were reminded that 'we also have wonderful things like fire hydrants ... and soda machines that we try to hide.' (56)

Handler and Gable dub the "hidden" features which are thereby continually revealed to visitors the "invisible landscape" of the site, commenting that "[f]or us, this attention to the invisible landscape took on the kind of rapid masking, unmasking, remasking juxtapositioning of surface and substance (is it real or is it Memorex, or does it matter?) that is associated with the postmodern" (57).

An explanation of the "postmodern thrill" which both performers and audience members may derive from such frame-breaking behaviour can be found in Fife's concept of "semantic slippage." Fife writes that:

> Semantic slippage is a process by which an original artefact or sign justifies the authenticity of a similar, though not necessarily directly related, reproduction. Successful slippage occurs when what is taken to be the 'original' object or meaning largely collapses into the contemporary meaning of an object or enactment. .... In semantic slippage, the denotation of different words, objects, or performances remains relatively stable and separate, but the connotation 'slips' to allow time and/or space

> to collapse so that the meaning of each of two or more words, objects, or performances melds or slides, one into the other. (4)

An example of such semantic slippage at work in the ghost tour context occurs within the discourse of Mercat Tours, which, as mentioned in the last chapter, invites its audiences to "[f]ollow an ancient tradition by seeking a guide at the Mercat Cross" on Edinburgh's Royal Mile (Mercat Tours, "Royal"). Significantly, however, the company's performances begin in fact at the foot of a reconstructed version of the Cross located a few feet away from the site of the original (demolished in 1756 "on the grounds that it impeded traffic"), the footprint of which is marked by a comparatively inconspicuous octagonal pattern of cobbles set into the pavement (McKean 14; see also Chambers 178n). Thus, within the Mercat Tours discourse, time and space literally do collapse in order that meaning can "slide" from the original monument to the reconstruction, thereby justifying the latter's authenticity.

Fife argues that it is the process of semantic slippage "that makes some contemporary objects or enactments 'authentic' in a modernist sense." However, the same process also thereby "creat[es] a situation that suggests that other objects or enactments are somehow inauthentic or fake." As he writes:

> A plastic 'Viking helmet,' for example, complete with upturned horns (which are normal in cartoons and beer commercials featuring 'Vikings,' but which have no relationship to the helmets of the historic Norse) is likely to seem inauthentic to most tourists because the semantic slippage is too obviously and visibly 'wrong' (the plastic material does not parallel the original materials in an acceptable fashion; upturned horns do not belong on the helmet at all – as many pamphlets and popular articles make quite clear). (4-5)

Significantly, Fife suggests that such objects or enactments can be interpreted "as belonging to a postmodernist form of tourism and would therefore not be about the modernist project of authenticity but rather about poking fun at the idea that such 'authenticity' is possible" (5).

Fife's description of touristic objects or enactments which operate by rendering the "semantic slippage ... too obviously and visibly 'wrong'" and thereby "poking fun at the idea that ... 'authenticity' is possible" encapsulates the performance aesthetic of Witchery Tours. Significantly, whereas Snow as well as Handler and Gable suggest that such frame-breaking behaviour constitutes an aberration of the generally accepted "code of good form" governing the majority of interactions which take place at their respective sites,[17] in Witchery's case it assumes the status of a conscious and deliberate performance aesthetic upon which the success of much of the humour of its tours relies. In this sense, it can be argued that the Witchery Tours discourse represents a more thoroughly – and more self-consciously – postmodern form of tourism than these other sites.

There are a number of ways in which the company's guides engage in rendering the semantic slippage inherent in their performances "too obviously and visibly 'wrong.'"

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[17] Snow, for example, argues that "Pilgrim-baiting" has a disruptive effect on the performance at Plimoth Plantation and is engaged in by only a small minority of visitors, while the majority of the "mocking" elements of interpreters' own play takes place back- or offstage rather than during their performances themselves (e.g., see pp.149-52). In the case of Colonial Williamsburg, Handler and Gable describe how, in the process of drawing visitors' attention to the "invisible landscape" of the site, interpreters "advised us to look past, or through, such anachronisms in order to imagine the real past." They therefore argue that "the guides' emphasis on the invisible landscape ... could be explained as an extension of the foundation's ongoing concern with absolute authenticity," rather than as an expression of an emerging postmodern touristic ethos (58).

One such technique is their practice of inserting into their narratives frequent "outrageously anachronistic" references to contemporary popular culture (Snow 118; cf. Kauppi 8). Significantly, the humour of many of these references operates according to the logic of pun or double entendre, devices which exemplify the semantic slippage that postmodernist theorists identify within language itself. Describing the Medieval punishment of being "broken upon the rack," for example, Lyal explains that the convict was "tied to a giant Wagon-wheel and everyone would stand aside while the chocolate melted [all over him]" (K. Smith, tour). On the "Ghosts & Gore Tour," meanwhile, Rory Macleod, a member of the army of "wild and bloody Highlanders" which invaded Edinburgh during the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745, explains that the design on his targe [shield] was "inspired by the King himself – Elvis." He adds that: "Often there would be sort of tinsel and … flashing lights [on it] as well" (Thompson, tour; see Figure 3.11).

Such purposely "corny humour" (K. Smith, interview) is a central element of the guides' discourse on the company's tours and operates to playfully subvert the "quest for authenticity" which audiences have been conditioned to expect as the dominant mode of contemporary tourism. Indeed, viewed as a "narrative delineation of … history" (Snow 193) such references are blatantly nonsensical and much of the humour they contain derives from the audience's awareness and enjoyment of this very fact. At a deeper level, however, they work by shifting the focus of the guides' discourse away from its narrative content towards the "contradictory categories" inherent in the performance situation itself: the juxtapositioning of contrasting time-frames; the "double identity" of the performers; the "dark" content of their narratives versus the light-heartedness of the

Figure 3.11. "inspired by the King himself": Rory Macleod, the Wild Highlander ("Ghosts & Gore Tour").

contemporary references; the contrasting rhetorical forms of historical narrative and joke; and the complex relationship between discourse and story within the performance space created on the company's tours as a whole. In so doing, they set into motion a ceaseless interplay between these categories which thus becomes the whole point of the discourse itself.

Elsewhere, the guides draw attention to the complex relationship between discourse and story on their tours by taking elements, such as props, from the performance frame itself and inserting them incongruously into the historical worlds depicted in their narratives. They thereby effect a literal "impingement of discourse space upon story space" (Dorst 126). During one tour I attended, for example, the Foule Clenger appears brandishing an aerosol can labelled "Anti-Plague Spray," explaining that "this … [was] sold at all good pharmaceutical outlets back in 1645," the time of the last great plague epidemic in the city (Thompson, tour). On another occasion, using a plastic rat to illustrate an account of the same epidemic, Lyal explains:

> It [is] known that just under half the population of rats in 1645 were plastic. … We worked out where they came from, we believe they … stowed away on tea-ships, from places as far away as the Far East. We know that because it says '[Made in] China' on the bottom. And they … stowed away in these tea-ships because they were travel-rats, their tails just folded into their bodies [demonstrates by pushing rat's tail up inside its body]. Fascinating. (K. Smith, tour)

The above extract clearly functions as a parody of the factual, documentary discourse of the modern tour guide in "information-giver" mode (Holloway 386). Its humorousness results not only from the too obvious and visible "wrongness" of the semantic slippage which enables a plastic rat to stand as an accurate representation of the rats which carried

the plague to Edinburgh in 1645, but also from the playful way in which discourse and story collide to produce a narrative on the plasticity of the seventeenth-century rats themselves. The extract also encapsulates Witchery's postmodernistic delight in the inauthentic and the fake, as the very features that signify the plastic rat's total lack of authenticity – its gimmicky foldaway tail; the fact of its being "Made in China"; and most obviously the status of plastic itself as a symbol of "all that [stands] over and against the organic, the natural and the authentic" (Overton 159) – are used within the parodic discourse as the identifiers of the historical or "real" rats. The effect is an implosion of "the distinction between simulation and the 'real'" (Storey 178) which playfully calls into question the very status of reality or authenticity itself.

One further means by which the company's guides "poke fun at the idea that 'authenticity' is possible" in the context of their tours is through the use of self-referential, meta-discursive comments designed to focus the audience's attention away from the narrative content of their discourse towards the workings of the performance itself. On one tour I attended, for example, after producing a pair of plastic eyeballs which he claims to have "cut off" the Mad Monk's face during a staged fight between the two characters, Lyal admits to his audience that "I've probably overdone it on [sic] the props department tonight." Several tours I attended also included an incident in which a stunt involving a supposed third performer appears to have gone wrong and during which

Lyal apologises: "I think we're training some new ghosts at the moment, you'll have to bear with me" (K. Smith, tour).[18]

Occasionally, such comments are developed into extended meta-discursive episodes such as that illustrated in the following extract, taken from an exchange between Alexander Clapperton and the Foule Clenger during a "Ghosts & Gore Tour" I attended. Clapperton asks the Clenger to explain to the audience how he and his colleagues identified those households which contained the bodies of plague victims to be collected for disposal:

FC:[19] ...us foule clengers, we wandered into areas like this ... and we were looking round the tenements here for a sign.

AC: What was the sign?

FC: Well, ... the sign was a white cloth, or a white rag. A white cloth, or a white rag, told us as foule clengers that there was a dead body in the room. [Raises voice, expectantly.] So, a white cloth, or a white rag, from any window, told us as foule clengers that there was a dead person in the room.

AC: [Nervously looking towards upper storeys of tenement opposite the tour party.] So, that's a white cloth, then?

FC: [Loudly.] A white cloth. [Laughter from audience.] A white cloth! [Aside, to Clapperton.] He's watching TV. Football's on.

AC: Yeah, Euro 2000's on.

FC: [Shouting.] Steve! [Laughter.] He's fallen asleep. Must have. [Laughter.] [?]

AC: [To audience.] It's a very visual tour this, so you can all imagine –

FC: Oh, look! [Everyone looks.] No, in my imagination. [Laughter.]

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[18] Even the fieldworker was on occasion made party to such meta-discursive comments. On one "Ghosts & Gore Tour" I attended, for example, Agnes Fynnie accuses a male audience member of persistently winking at her – "He's a right winker" – afterwards instructing me to "delete that bit from the tape" (Thompson, tour). On a "Murder & Mystery Tour" I attended, meanwhile, Lyal berates Agnes for throwing her bucket of water over the audience, exclaiming: "She's got electronic equipment!" (K. Smith, tour).

[19] FC = Foule Clenger (Cameron Pirie); AC = Alexander Clapperton (Simon Thompson); W = woman in audience.

AC:    Anyway, you can imagine a white cloth hanging in the window –
W:     [Indicating a fellow audience member.] [?She's got] a white bag? [Laughter.]
AC:    Yeah, I suppose, why not?
FC:    We've got a very low budget. [Laughter.] (Thompson, tour)

In this extract, an episode which initially appears designed to communicate factual information about the work practices of foule clengers during the plague epidemic of 1645, instead turns out to be predominantly concerned with the performance techniques of the Witchery tour guides themselves. For the duration of this exchange, story is subsumed entirely into discourse, creating a performance space which is infinitely self-referential and whose predominant characteristic, like that of postmodern vignette, is the undecidability of the relationship between surface and image, discourse and story. Rather than functioning merely as a vehicle for the presentation of a particular version of the city's past, the performance itself becomes displayed as a text to be read. Thus, as Dorst writes of the theme park, the Witchery Tours discourse is "not only infinitely self-referential but also aware of its textuality and capable of textualising (and commodifying) even this very awareness" (115).

Significantly, audience members themselves not infrequently collaborate with the performers in the production and maintenance of this postmodern vignette, suggesting that they too are actively aware of the self-reflexive textuality of the performance and of the oscillating play between discourse and story on which much of the tours' humour depends. In the exchange between Lyal and the Mad Monk quoted in the previous section, for example, the audience member whom the Monk identifies as his "girlfriend" cooperates with the performers by agreeing to "take responsibility" for the Monk, while

the woman in the extract just quoted suggests the white bag of a fellow tour participant as a substitute for the rag which has failed to appear in the tenement window. Similarly, on one "Murder & Mystery Tour" I attended, a female audience member interrupts Lyal's description of the various tortures used to extract confessions during the witch-hunts of the seventeenth century with the comment that "I read some book which said that they tortured them another way: they made them take the tour." Lyal responds by informing her that "almost anyone, madam, could be accused of being a witch," particularly "if [they] made themselves deeply unpopular," and proceeds to demonstrate the thumbscrews on her for the entertainment of her fellow audience members (Martin, tour).

Such episodes suggest that, contrary to the scepticism of some critics, the concept of the "post-tourist" who recognises and appreciates irony and who delights in "playing at and with touring" may have at least some validity in the context of contemporary tourism (Ritzer and Liska 102). Indeed, it can be argued that the success of Witchery's performances is largely dependent on the cultivation of precisely this kind of self-conscious, "role-distanced" attitude on the part of its audience members (McCrone et al. 35). As David states, although the company's theatrical performance aesthetic "lets [the audience] be ... caught up in it..., lets them use their imaginations ... or project a little bit more and believe a little bit more in what the character's saying," nonetheless they do so "in a ... distanced kind of way, they kind of believe in it <u>but they know it's all a joke, ... all a fake</u>" (Martin, interview, emphasis added).

## "it's not about fear...": Light-heartedness and scaring the audience

A final meaning of light-heartedness within the Witchery Tours discourse relates to the fact that the company's tours are not (nor are they intended to be) genuinely fear-inducing. Lorna, for example, uses the term light-hearted to distinguish between the "serious" approach adopted by other ghost tour companies whom she describes as intent on scaring their audiences and Witchery's own focus on "entertainment": "We do emphasise that there's a few other companies who are quite serious and who ... want to scare you. Whereas we emphasise the light-hearted side, ... we want people to know that it's more ... entertainment, than wanting to scare the life out of them" (Baxter, interview). Cameron, meanwhile, uses the term to describe a shift which he perceives to have taken place in the style of the company's own performances over time:

> In the early days, ... I think [the tours] were scary. I remember jumping out as the Mad Monk of the Cowgate in one of the closes in the Old Town and it was pitch black and people really were terrified, terrified. They were very frightened. But over the past few years, ... a lot of the closes are lit up, renovations have taken place. So it's more light-hearted, these days, ... it's not that frightening. (Pirie)

Other employees, though they do not use the term itself, make similar observations regarding the light-heartedness of the company's approach. David, for example, comments that "[i]t would be really easy in that situation [on the 'Murder & Mystery Tour'] to freak people out and I think I've heard of other tour companies that try and do that. .... But that's never really happened deliberately on our tour[s]. So I don't think it's that scary" (Martin, interview). Similarly, Robin Bankhead comments that "I can't really see [the tours] as scary," noting that "because they're presented in such a

humorous way, it's ... quite difficult to give people a real chill" (interview). Robin Mitchell, meanwhile, states that "it was never our main intention [to scare people]. ... [I]n the early days ... we tried to do the tour quite straight, quite sinister, but ... [for] us it didn't work" (quoted in Mathers 22).

The company's employees attribute much of the light-heartedness of their performances, and the corresponding lack of emphasis placed on scaring their audiences, to their use of jumper-outers. The role of the jumper-outer on the company's tours can be compared to that of the "plant" who often features as part of the narration of the oral horror story, whose role is to supplement the "power" of the story by performing such actions as "slowly creak[ing] open a door, slam[ming] down a window, scream[ing], or mak[ing] some other surprising sound at a climactic moment in the narration" (Stewart 39). Similarly, each appearance of the jumper-outer on Witchery's tours is calculated to produce an immediate, physical reaction or "scare" amongst the audience, typically manifested in behaviour such as screaming, clinging to or hiding behind fellow audience members and attempts to run away.

However, company employees' descriptions of their performances frequently contain an implicit distinction between what they refer to as the "scares," "frights," "shocks" or "surprises" given audience members by the jumper-outer, on the one hand, and, on the other, experiences which are seen to make people "frightened" or to produce actual "fear." This distinction is made particularly apparent in their apparently contradictory assertions that their tours are not "frightening" or "scary," despite their acknowledgement that audience members are given frequent scares or frights in the

course of each performance. Cameron, for example, comments that audience members "do get a fright" on the company's tours but nonetheless maintains that the tours are "not that frightening" (Pirie). David recalls occasions on the "Murder & Mystery Tour" when "everyone freaked out" at the appearance of the jumper-outer, but states that "definitely they're just jumpy" rather than actually afraid (Martin, interview). Similarly, Robin Mitchell states that although "some people get a few surprises because of the characters," "I wouldn't have said [that the tours are scary]" (quoted in Mathers 22).

Significantly, the distinction between these two types of experience is often expressed using language associated with authenticity. Thus Cameron states that, in "the early days," "people <u>really</u> were terrified" on the company's tours, while Robin Bankhead comments that the light-heartedness of its present-day performances means that "it's ... quite difficult to give people a <u>real</u> chill" (Pirie; Bankhead, interview, emphases added). Similarly, Richard clearly distinguishes between the adrenaline-pumping shocks or frights received by the company's own audiences and what he describes as the "eerieness" of those experiences which leave people "<u>genuinely</u> worried, ... <u>genuinely</u> frightened" (emphases added). Asked whether he considers the company's tours to be "scary," he states:

> it depends what you define as scary... I would expect that if the jumper-outer's doing their job properly, everyone on the tour should get a fright, or a shock. But I would define scary as an ongoing thing, as you go round, you're kind of worried, scared. There's a sort of eerieness about it. I don't think [a Witchery tour is] eerie in the same way as ... going down Mary King's Close,[20] or something like that, ... because [there] you're in a

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[20] Located underneath the City Chambers on the Royal Mile, Mary King's Close is widely believed to be haunted by the ghosts of its original occupants, who are said to have been walled into the close by the Town Council during a plague epidemic in the city

dark place, which is genuinely said to be haunted with ghosts. I don't think it's scary in that respect. I think it's entertaining and I think you should, on the tour, get several shocks or frights and it should get your adrenaline pumping at various points. ... In that respect, I'd say yeah, but in the eerieness aspect..., I'd say no. (Norman, interview)[21]

Such statements clearly reflect a perceived dichotomy on the part of Witchery's employees between such "real" fear and fear that, by contrast, can be thought of as in some sense "fake" or contrived. Specifically, they suggest that the recipients of the frights provided by the jumper-outer on the company's own tours are not really afraid and that their reaction to such performance techniques is in some way distinguishable from genuine fear.

The use of jumper-outers in the context of Witchery's performances exhibits clear parallels with the type of performance techniques found in the commercially operated haunted house, which typically features "actors dressed as traditional scare figures" who "threaten the audience" by "jump[ing] out from behind curtains or panels to growl and

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in 1645. Guided tours of the close were conducted, at the time of my field research, by Mercat Tours, as mentioned in Chapter Two (see Wilson et al., Hidden 2-22).

[21] Mercat tour guide Steve Humphreys similarly contrasts the contrived, physical "scares" to which audience members are subjected on tours which feature jumper-outers with the deeper, emotional responses which can be created through a reliance on "the power of word to create the atmosphere." As he explains: "I think ... if you can actually get the imagination engaged into a story, [get] people to think about it, I think ultimately it can be a lot more terrifying – psychological terror is usually more horrifying than, say, ... slasher flicks or anything like that. ... It's like going back to when you were a kid and ... getting told ghost stories and being terrified. And huddling underneath your bedcovers or in your sleeping bag. It's that type of thing, you know? It's playing on the mind" (interview).

lunge at the visitor" (Magliocco 19, 23).[22] Significantly, the reactions displayed by

Witchery's audiences to the jump-outs featured on the company's tours bear marked

similarity to those observed by Sabina Magliocco on the part of visitors to the haunted

house. In her work on the Bloomington Jaycees' haunted house in Indiana, Magliocco

notes what she describes as "the exaggerated reaction of some of the adult visitors" to the

house, remarking on the way in which "they scream, shriek, cling to each other" and

make frequent "exclamations such as 'Brian, save me!' (from a young woman to her

companion), and 'I'm so scared.'" Significantly, Magliocco argues that although visitors

to the house "do ... [feel] something akin to fear," they are not actually afraid and that

such "exaggerated reactions" therefore represent an "affectation" of fear rather than

genuine terror. As she writes: "Since according to questionnaires and interviews visitors

are not really that frightened, this behavior suggests that what is being expressed is in fact

an enactment or a parody of fear" (23-4). This interpretation accords with the distinction

perceived by Witchery's employees between the contrived frights provided by the

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[22] "[C]ommercial and contrived haunted houses" such as that studied by Sabina
Magliocco have become increasingly popular as "fund-raising and entertainment venues
during the Halloween season" in the United States since the 1950s (Grider 188). Sylvia
Grider describes how: "Typically, a respected service organisation will transform a local
vacant building into a mock, interactive haunted house by creating various rooms, each of
which is a scary tableau. Eviscerations and other sadistic torture scenes usually
predominate. Designated members of the organisation dress up as various supernatural
characters who either act out frightening mini-dramas or escort paying customers through
the maze" (188). Grider states that "a visit to the mock haunted house in lieu of trick-or-
treating unquestionably has become one of the most popular current Halloween
activities" in the United States (189; cf. Dégh and Vázsonyi 16-7, 22-6). In contrast,
such attractions remain relatively unknown in the UK.

jumper-outer on their own tours and experiences which they regard as genuinely frightening.

That audience members on Witchery's tours, like visitors to the haunted house, do not experience genuine terror is indicated by the rapidity with which their initial "exaggerated reaction" to each jump-out is supplanted by laughter and general "hilarity." As Lorna comments: "We keep people on their toes with one or two scares, but our ghosts tend to bring more hilarity than anything else" (Baxter, quoted in Fallis 11). She explains that "[u]sually ... the initial reaction" of the company's audiences to the appearances of the jumper-outer "is the scare, the fright ... and then it's the hilarity afterwards. Everybody has a bit of a laugh as they start to calm down." Similarly, Caroline Mathers offers the following description of the audience's reaction to one of the jump-outs featured on the "Murder & Mystery Tour" she attended as part of her field research: "Everybody just screamed and scattered...., running up the alleyway, ... running down the alleyway, laughing. And he [the jumper-outer] was just chasing everybody round, it was really funny. .... Everybody laughed and screamed" (interview).

Such descriptions accord with the findings of Kauppi's work on Edinburgh's ghost tours, in which she identifies two contrasting performance styles typically adopted by guides and discusses their often contradictory effects on their audiences. "On one hand," she explains, the use of the "dramatic, theatrical style" (including "gloomy tones of voice, screaming and vicious laughter") provided "an entertainingly scary part of the 'show.'" Conversely, the "less dramatic," "documentary" style (whereby guides "did not scream, shoot with a fake gun or anything of the sort") had a "comforting" effect on the

audience. On the other hand, however, she observes that "the effect worked also in the totally opposite way," so that "[t]he drama attached to the stories" as part of the theatrical style "made the listeners also aware … that 'this is only a story, true maybe, but in the past,'" while the documentary style "had the effect of painting very real pictures" in the minds of audience members (15-16, emphasis in original). Describing her reaction to one particular tour (in the underground vaults) during which the guide adopted the latter style, she comments:

> No special effects, but it made … me [want] to lean against the wall and … go out pretty soon. I do not know if [the guide] really believes what she tells down in the Vaults, but it certainly sounded [as] if she did, and that is more convincing than the shocking but playful tricks that make one first scream and then laugh. (16)

Magliocco offers a possible explanation for audiences' contradictory reactions to "shocking but playful" performance techniques such as those mentioned by Kauppi (including the use of jumper-outers) when she writes that the haunted house is "a form of folk drama in which the audience collaborates with the performers in order to maintain an illusion." Central to the definition of folk drama is "the stipulation that the event in question be primarily for the purpose of entertainment; in other words, the audience must be convinced that the action is contrived." According to Magliocco, "adult visitors understand the haunted house as drama," since "they recognize that the monsters are acting a part and do not pose real threats" (20, 22; cf. Ellis, "Mock-Ordeal" 488-9). Like the figures represented in the haunted house, the personae adopted by the jumper-outer on Witchery's tours are also "chosen and costumed with the knowledge that the audience will regard them as completely imaginary" (20-2). Their stylised, stereotypical

Halloween-style costumes and plastic masks and their clownish behaviour (e.g., play-fighting with the tour guide and emptying buckets of water over the audience) clearly mark these characters as examples of the "traditional supernatural scare figures" – including "witches" and "ghosts" – who also populate the commercialised haunted house. Significantly, according to Magliocco, adult visitors to the haunted house do not find such figures "truly frightening" because they "have been enculturated not to fear [them] through repeated exposure to them in films, literature, and other experiences generally recognised as contrived" (see Figure 3.12).

That audience members are intended to accept the "ghosts" played by the jumper-outer on Witchery's tours as "completely imaginary" is indicated by the way in which the company's guides actively discourage their audiences from believing that the locations visited on their tours are "genuinely … haunted." Keith, for example, admits that "you have people leaving [the tours] feeling really quite creeped out at times," but asserts that:

> I think they've got an understanding [of] what the tour was… Say the tour was really serious and there wasn't [sic] … characters, they might go, 'Oh, something happened'… But you try and make it apparent that that's not the case, it's just a bit of laugh and if you feel a bit clammy, a bit frightened afterwards, well, that's because of what we did to you, rather than what something else supernaturally did to you. (K. Smith, interview)

Moreover, like the interactive tableaux featured in the haunted house, the jump-outs on Witchery's tours are overtly staged and contrived "dramatic scriptings" involving "assigned, rehearsed roles[,] … specified costuming, props, effects, and … set speeches and dialogue" (Ellis, "Mock-Ordeal" 494-5). Thus, like those which take place in the haunted house, the nature of Witchery's performances "makes fear enjoyable by localizing it and confining it to a limited area," thereby providing an experience "so

Figure 3.12. Not "truly frightening": the skeleton ("Murder & Mystery Tour").

strongly bracketed in space and time" that it "allow[s] the participant to predict what will happen next to an extent that real ordeals do not" (Magliocoo 25; cf. Ellis, "Mock-Ordeal" 496). As Magliocco notes: "Although the element of surprise is important in 'scaring' the audience, the visitor generally knows what to expect inside the haunted house" and visitors enter the house "expecting to be scared" (23, 25).

Thus, in contrast to those experiences which produce genuine fear, in which "fear arises in a spontaneous and uncontrolled environment," the success of the scares given audience members on Witchery's tours is dependent on the generation and maintenance of "an intense mood of excitement and expectation" amongst the audience for the duration of the performance (Magliocco 25, 23). As in the case of the haunted house, this is achieved by means of a technique which Magliocco refers to as "hyping." She describes how the operators of the Bloomington Jaycees' haunted house "use a technique they call 'hype' to create an expectation of fear in the audience," for example by having "the ticket-takers at the door ... warn the audience, 'It's really scary,'" or by sending "a monster ... running through the blocks-long entrance line" (23). A number of comparable techniques are also used by Witchery's employees in order to "hype" their audiences. Even before the tour begins, comments made in the company's promotional materials ensure that its audiences "know what to expect" from its performances. On the company's advertising board, for example, we read that: "Due to ghostly encounters you attend at your own risk," and on its website that: "With a ghost as your guide, there will no doubt be a few strange incidents and ghastly appearances" (Witchery Tours, http://www.witcherytours.com/). Similarly, during the opening minutes of each tour, the

guide makes it clear to his audience that "there's going to be other characters on the tour" (K. Smith, interview).  Thus, for example, in the introduction to one "Murder & Mystery Tour" I attended, Lyal tells his audience: "I've come back from the dead, … [b]ut I'm not the only one…  As I take you round … tonight, I'll pretty much guarantee that we'll see something that you'll wish you hadn't, by the end of the night.  Keep your sixth sense tuned in and I'm sure we'll see something quite exciting" (Martin, tour).

As the tour proceeds, the guides continue to build up the atmosphere of excitement and anticipation by means of a number of similar performance techniques. Keith, for example, describes how he aims to prepare his audience for the initial appearance of the jumper-outer on each tour by "mak[ing] people anticipate something coming up," thus "build[ing] [them] up for [the] fright" (K. Smith, interview).  The environment in which the company's tours takes place itself contributes significantly to this "hyping" effect, as the unfamiliar "little, narrow, dark alleyways" in which the tours take place, and the many twists and turns taken along the route, combine to produce a "scary" atmosphere and a sense of disorientation which heightens the "expectation of fear" (cf. Magliocco 23).  Magliocco notes that being in "a dark, unfamiliar place" was one of the most commonly expressed fears among visitors to the haunted house (21).

The company's guides frequently exploit these contextual features in order to intensify the mood of excitement and expectation amongst their audiences.  Robin Bankhead, for example, states that their anticipation of the frights in store for them "does make [the audience] very paranoid and as a guide I love that…  I like to egg them on a bit and [say], like, 'Who wants to go round this corner first?  I'm not doing it!' [that] sort of

thing" (interview). Similarly, Richard describes how he tries to maximise the impact of jumper-outer Agnes Fynnie's first appearance on the "Murder & Mystery Tour" by covertly "manipulat[ing] the group into a position" in the moments before the jump-out actually occurs: "I try and get the people who are going to scream loud and get really excited up at the front, so that as the witch jumps out, it gives them a fright, they scream at the top of their voice, which amplifies the witch's scream by ten" (Norman, interview).[23]

As Magliocco observes in the case of the haunted house, audience members on Witchery's tours "collaborate with the performers" in producing and sustaining this atmosphere for the duration of the performance (24). This they do largely by "feed[ing] off each other[s']" excitement (K. Smith, interview; cf. Magliocco 23). Keith, for example, describes how: "If you've got a group that are quite scared, especially females, then [that] can definitely rub off on the rest of the group... [A] kind of ... nervous anxiety can creep through the crowd and that's definitely a success on the tour, ... because you've got them in the palm of your hand" (K. Smith, interview). Similarly, Cameron describes how, during the jump-outs themselves, "people just react, because ... the emotion has been created in the atmosphere" (Pirie).[24]

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[23] Alternatively, guides describe how they sometimes attempt to "lull" audience members into a false sense of security. Keith, for example, comments that even though the audience members "know there's going to be characters on the tour," "You can lull people [into] thinking..., 'Oh well, I must be mistaken.'" As he states, "I find the best way ... is to ... be quite serious at the start and then, suddenly, bang! You ... take people by surprise" (K. Smith, interview).

[24] Similar comments were made during interviews by employees of Edinburgh's other ghost tour companies. Auld Reekie tour guide David Swift, for example, describes

The success of this collaboration between performers and audience members is aptly illustrated by Caroline Mathers' account of her experience as an audience member on the "Murder & Mystery Tour." According to Caroline, the key to audiences' enjoyment of Witchery's tours lies in the fact that audience members "<u>know</u> something's going to happen" but just "don't know when and who it's going to be and what they're going to do to you when they do jump out." She describes how:

> when I was on that tour, I was petrified, walking round, the whole time. A funny kind of scared, just anticipation, waiting for somebody to jump out at me…. It's so funny. …. [I]t was like we talked about before, … being on the ghost train, waiting for that person to tickle your head, and that's why the ghost train's so scary. … [I]t was the sheer anticipation of somebody jumping out in a silly costume to throw a bucket of water over me. It's funny. … [I]t's not fear, it's just anticipation. Like, fun scared. You <u>know</u> something's going to happen. That's why I compare it to the ghost train, because it's that same kind of feeling that you have when you're a kid, or even an adult, when you're on a ghost train, that you know somebody's going to touch your head, but you just don't know when. And you just can't stop laughing. It was a bit like that. Hiding behind the person you're with because you know somebody's going to jump out on you! [Laughter.] (interview)

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how "[w]e'll go in [to the underground vaults] and everybody will start pushing each other, going, 'Oh my God, what is it? Aaargh!' And [in] round about five minutes you've got about forty complete headless chickens running about like lunatics and they don't know why. … [P]anic breaks out and spreads. … [O]ne person's reaction can translate to the entire party" (interview). Other guides describe how laughter often spreads in a similar way. According to Mercat's Andrew Morris, for example, "you will get two or three people who start laughing at some bit that other people wouldn't start laughing at, and they're like a seed. And other people will start giggling because this person's laughing away and it's infectious" (interview). As Magliocco suggests (23), such reactions (particularly fear) may be communicated not only amongst audience members themselves but also between guide and audience. Thus Mercat's Kathleen Brogan states that "when the guide gets scared the whole group absolutely end themselves, they just get so terrified" (interview).

On the surface, Caroline's description of how she felt during the tour – "A funny kind of scared," "fun scared"; "I was petrified," yet "[could]n't stop laughing" – seems paradoxical. As Magliocco asks, "what is so much fun about being scared?" (25). Significantly, however, like Witchery's employees themselves, Caroline distinguishes between the experience of being "fun scared" and that of being genuinely afraid. Crucially, she points out that what she felt during the tour was "not fear," but "just anticipation." Thus, as Magliocco argues in the case of the haunted house, audience members' reactions to the performance techniques employed by Witchery's guides, "far from indicating credulity," suggest in fact their "complete awareness" of the status of the performance as "a dramatic presentation" (Magliocco 25).

The company's audiences know that they are not in any real danger at the hands of the jumper-outer and this awareness enables them to enjoy the experience of "being scared" in a safe and entertaining way, "playing along with the performers in a drama which requires their active participation" (24). As David comments: "often, you get this real sense of disappointment when the jumper-ooter appears, everyone kind of goes, 'Oh, right, oh, that's a bit boring.' But [once] they realise that it's not about fear and it's actually about fun, then they begin to have a good time" (Martin, interview). This last comment suggests that, as Magliocco writes, "The enjoyment of an experience one knows is contrived is not a contradiction in terms" (25). Rather, "Such an experience demands from the audience a suspension of disbelief," an attitude of "dramatic engrossment that includes active cooperation with the artifice" (Ellis, "Mock-Ordeal"

496), similar to that identified by Cohen and others as central to the experience of recreational tourism as a whole.

As we might expect, however, Witchery's guides also occasionally delight in breaking the illusion thus created, disallowing their audiences' suspension of disbelief by means of a light-hearted meta-discursive commentary on the "scariness" (or otherwise) of the performance itself. The most notable instance of this takes place during the final jump-out on the "Murder & Mystery Tour," in which the jumper-outer adopts the persona of the Mad Monk of the Cowgate. Robin Bankhead explains that "the first time [the Monk] jumps out it is supposed to be really crap," pointing out that "we've worked very carefully ... to achieve that effect" (interview). Accordingly, when he first jumps out from behind a pillar as the tour party makes its way between stops, the Monk is greeted with derision from Lyal – "Was that supposed to be scary?!" – and is instructed to repeat the jump-out, whereupon the audience obligingly responds with screams of "terror." He then continues his antics by shaking hands with passers-by, lifting his tunic to oncoming traffic and "tightrope-walking" along the top of a wall for the audience's entertainment. After the tour party's arrival at its next stop, the Monk reappears, whereupon Lyal tells him: "You're not very scary tonight. .... [Y]ou're not very frightening."

In this final jump-out on the "Murder & Mystery Tour," the performers once again draw their audiences' attention away from the content of their tours towards the workings of the performance itself in order to "poke fun at the idea that 'authenticity' is possible." In this instance, they parody the widespread perception of the ghost tour as a "scary" experience and the earnest efforts of more "serious" tour companies to produce

genuine fear amongst their audiences. In the process, they also poke fun at themselves

and their own performances and thereby remind their audiences that the tour should not

be taken too seriously, but rather should be accepted in a spirit of light-heartedness. This

episode thus neatly encapsulates the playfulness of postmodern tourism as it manifests

itself within the Witchery Tours discourse as a whole and demonstrates the self-reflexive

readiness of both performers and audience to "play at and with touring" (Ritzer and Liska

102).

## Conclusion

This chapter has analysed the discourse of Edinburgh-based ghost tour company

Witchery Tours, arguing that whereas the Mercat Tours discourse exemplifies the model

of tourism as a modernistic "quest for authenticity," the case of this latter company is

indicative of a cultural shift towards postmodern- or post-tourism, in which tourism

comes to be seen as a playful "game" rather than a serious "quest." I have argued that the

company's discourse exemplifies several features of the emerging postmodern touristic

ethos, most notably a preoccupation with "the enjoyability of the surface appearance of

the attraction, rather than with its 'reality' or 'authenticity'"; a tendency towards the

nivellation or "destructuring [of] the boundaries between the copy and the original, or

between sign and reality"; and "an emphasis on visual, figurative rather than linear,

literary sensibility" (Cohen, "Contemporary" 22; Wang 54; Narváez 173). In order to

explore the ways in which these and other features manifest themselves within the

discourse of Witchery Tours, my analysis has been structured around four distinct but interrelated meanings of light-heartedness, a concept which encapsulates the company's postmodern performance aesthetic and fundamentally informs its activities at a number of levels.

Firstly, light-heartedness signifies a markedly less insistent concern with historical accuracy or authenticity on the part of Witchery Tours than that which characterises the discourse of Mercat Tours; secondly, it relates to the theatricality of Witchery's performances and in particular to its espousal of what Snow calls "the actor identity" (133); thirdly, it refers to the way in which the company's guides produce a peculiarly "postmodern thrill" (Snow 208) amongst their audiences by drawing their attention to the ironies and inauthenticities inherent in the performance situation itself; and lastly, it relates to the fact that its tours are not intended to be genuinely fear-inducing but rather to create "an enactment or ... parody of fear" which requires the audience's "active cooperation with the artifice" (Magliocco 24; Ellis, "Mock-Ordeal" 496).

In the following chapter, the questions raised in the last section of this chapter regarding the relationship between "fright" and "fear" as it pertains to the issue of in/authenticity are further developed through a discussion of a third Edinburgh-based ghost tour company. This company, City of the Dead, places a very different emphasis on fear as an aspect of the ghost tour experience. Whereas Witchery's tours are designed to produce a series of frights or scares whose success depends on the audience's awareness that the situation is wholly contrived, the performances of City of the Dead are predicated upon the promise of a genuine encounter with a demonstrably harmful

supernatural entity, the Mackenzie Poltergeist. The company places an strong emphasis on the genuineness and potential dangerousness of this experience. In contrast to the postmodernistic delight in the inauthentic and the fake exhibited in the case of Witchery Tours, City of the Dead's creation of the Mackenzie Poltergeist story and its involvement of tour participants in an ostensive quest to act out the story represent an instance of authenticity actively recaptured within the postmodern touristic context.

# Chapter Four: CITY OF THE DEAD

## AND THE TOURISM OF FEAR

**"locked in a graveyard at night with an active poltergeist" – City of the Dead, flier**

In the previous chapter's analysis of the light-hearted, post-touristic ethos of Witchery Tours, I argued that this ethos manifests itself in a number of ways within the company's discourse, including a minimal concern for historical accuracy and authenticity; an espousal of the actor identity; a celebration of visual spectacle and play; and a self-reflexive foregrounding of the plane of discourse itself. Despite the fact that audience members are given several physical "frights" or "scares" in the course of each performance, its guides do not consider their tours to be truly frightening and indeed actively discourage their audiences from interpreting any of their experiences on the tours as the result of genuine supernatural activity. However, this contrasts with most other ghost tour companies whose guides perform their stories in "genuine haunted locations" (Mercat Tours, http://www.mercat-tours.co.uk). In many cases the chance of a supernatural encounter is promoted as a central element of the experience of the tour itself.

One tour which offers a particularly dramatic instance of such an encounter is that operated by a third Edinburgh-based ghost tour company, City of the Dead. This tour promises its audiences an experience "[y]ou won't forget": that of being "locked in a graveyard at night with an active poltergeist" (flier). Billed as Edinburgh's "Original

Haunted Graveyard Tour" (City of the Dead, advertising board), the City of the Dead tour

culminates in the Covenanters' Prison, a locked section of the city's Greyfriars graveyard

to which only the company has access. There a tomb that has become known as the

"Black Mausoleum" is the reputed site of a supernatural entity which the company has

named the Mackenzie Poltergeist.[1]

In this chapter, the case of City of the Dead is used to examine the role of fear, or

"horror," within the ghost tour discourse. I explore the process of legend-creation

through which the Mackenzie Poltergeist has come to be represented within the

company's discourse, analysing ways in which it has provided the phenomenon with a

dramatic and believable history for presentation on its tours, in its promotional materials

and in its dealings with the media. I argue that this legend continues to be (re)created in

response to public fascination with the phenomenon. It is characterised by the

maintenance of a careful balance between "explanation" and "mystery" which has proved

particularly effective in heightening the draw of the supernatural encounter which the

company promises its audiences.

In the latter part of the chapter, I analyse ways in which each of the company's

tours involves the active performance of the Mackenzie Poltergeist legend by tour

participants. This is a performance which fundamentally shapes their experience of the

event and its structure and character as a whole. In other words, the guide not only tells

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[1] The reader will note that several variant spellings of <u>Mackenzie</u> (e.g., <u>MacKenzie</u>, <u>McKenzie</u> and the older Scots <u>Mackingie</u>/<u>Mackinzie</u>) are used both within the company's discourse and in the other sources quoted throughout this chapter. In the interests of consistency, unless quoting from another text, I adopt the spelling used by Sir George Mackenzie's biographer, Andrew Lang.

the audience the story of the Poltergeist, but the entire tour is structured around the possibility of an actual encounter with the phenomenon inside the Black Mausoleum. In the event that an "attack" occurs on any given tour, these narrative and performance frames collapse into one another, with participants literally acting out the legend. In this respect, I will argue, the City of the Dead tour bears a marked similarity to the activity of teenage legend-tripping which has been extensively studied by folklorists and which, like the tour, can be interpreted as a form of ostensive action involving the "literal acting out … of local supernatural legends" (Ellis, "Legend-Trips" 67).

## Prologue

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The fact that "there were three existing big [ghost] tour companies in Edinburgh" prior to the establishment of City of the Dead in 1999 meant that, if it were to prove successful, any new company would have to offer its audiences an experience significantly different from those provided by its competitors. Company cofounder Jan Henderson describes how each of the city's existing ghost tour operators had "a speciality": "Auld Reekie was the scary one, Witchery was the funny one, Mercat was the historically accurate one." As a result, he continues, "we decided … to go for all three. … [W]e tried to put together a tour that had humour and history and was scarier than the rest as well" (interview).

A primary concern in setting up the new company was to find a "haunted" location which could compete with the underground vaults visited by Auld Reekie,

Mercat and Robin's Tours. As Jan explains: "Edinburgh has a legend of an underground city, which in the last few years has caught on massively. … So it's difficult to set up a rival tour company when you're not going underground and all the other tour companies are" (interview). In March 1999, during an interview broadcast on Radio Scotland's Scottish Connection programme, he let it be known that "I'm looking for some kind of premises. A warehouse, a shop, … anything. But it has to be genuinely haunted … and it has to be large enough to take people in… I might make it part of a tour" (quoted in Henderson, Ghost 42). Graveyards were recognised as a viable option at an early stage, since, as Jan comments: "if it's a ghost tour there's only one thing that's going to match underground caverns and that's a graveyard at night" (interview).

The idea of using Greyfriars graveyard and in particular the Covenanters' Prison as a location for the company's tours was suggested to Jan by a former caretaker at the site, who happened to have heard the radio broadcast. As Jan recalls: "by a process of luck I got to know one of the caretakers of Greyfriars church and he began to tell me all these stories of things that had happened in the Covenanters' Prison" and the surrounding area since late in 1998 (Henderson, interview). Thus he learned that, during the first six months of 1999, several visitors to the graveyard had "mention[ed] a feeling of intense cold…, accompanied by a sweet but sickening smell," which had manifested themselves first around the mausoleum of a seventeenth-century Lord Advocate, Sir George Mackenzie, close to the entrance to the Prison. The final and most dramatic incident to take place on the site of this mausoleum had occurred in March 1999, when, "in front of onlookers," "A woman looking into McKenzie's tomb [was] thrown back down the

steps" leading up to its entrance (Henderson, "Paranormal," 15 April 2001). Indeed, in the weeks immediately following this incident, "paranormal activity seem[ed] to have ceased in Greyfriars altogether."

The following month, however, "The intense cold and sweet smell re-appear[ed]," this time within the Prison itself and especially in and around one particular tomb. Over time, the cold encountered in this tomb became "so intense it [was] painful to the flesh" and visitors heard sounds such as "rapping," "breathing" and "giggling" issuing from within its walls. In May 1999, "A member of Greyfriars' staff complain[ed] of a feeling of 'always being watched'" when passing this particular tomb and "[j]okingly ... refer[red] to [it] as THE BLACK MAUSOLEUM," the name by which it subsequently became known. During the same month, "a church member experience[d] 'intense cold and a feeling of overwhelming nausea'" as she approached the same spot (Henderson, "Paranormal," 15 April 2001; cf. Ghost 46-50).

In June 1999, the City of Edinburgh Council, which is responsible for the management of graveyards in the city, locked the Covenanters' Prison to the public, ostensibly because it was being "used by various undesirables" (Bell), though perhaps more probably, as the City of the Dead tour guides tell their audiences, in reaction to the incidents just described. Shortly thereafter, Jan recalls, he and cofounder Kate Kavanagh "took all [the caretaker's] stories and the things that had happened and using that as the basis ... put together a historical, humorous tour which ended up in [the Black Mausoleum]" (Henderson, interview). They applied for, and were granted, the Council's permission to take tour parties into the Prison at night.

Despite the caretaker's accounts of mysterious occurrences in and around the

Covenanters' Prison in the months leading up to the commencement of the City of the

Dead tour, Jan professes that he and Kate "never expected [the] kind of reaction" which

has been evidenced on the part of tour participants (Henderson, interview).  During the

first two years of the company's existence, audience members have fallen victim to more

than seventy alleged poltergeist attacks, involving sudden and intense "cold spots,"

nausea, cuts and bruising which frequently do not appear until the day after the tour and

even loss of consciousness (Henderson, Ghost 10, see "Paranormal").  To illustrate, I

quote three reasonably typical examples here, collected by Jan for inclusion in his book,

The Ghost That Haunted Itself.

Twenty-one-year-old Rachael Darrow, from Wisconsin, who attended the tour on

1 September 2000, gives the following account of her experience in the Black

Mausoleum:

> In the Covenanters' Prison I felt extremely faint and started breathing
> rapidly.  I do not get scared easily, so I don't know why I had this
> reaction.  While we were walking toward the tomb [i.e., the Black
> Mausoleum]..., I felt as if it were suddenly getting colder.  I did not think
> much of it, because it was a chilly night, but as soon as we entered the
> [Mausoleum] I began to shake uncontrollably.  I ended up having to brace
> myself against the wall, shaking and hyperventilating – I felt I could not
> breathe properly.  I felt better the moment we were allowed to leave the
> area.  This is a very strange thing to happen to me because I have never
> fainted in my life and have never felt that way before or since.  The next
> day I had a welt above my left eye that did not go away for about two
> weeks.  The experience will stay with me forever.  (quoted in Henderson,
> Ghost 59)

A similarly detailed account is given by Jan Adamson-Reese, from Aberdeenshire, who

took part on the tour on 20 May 2000.  She describes how:

> As we huddled together at the back of the tomb, ... all of a sudden I felt violently sick. .... This intense wave of nausea continued for a minute or two..., but once we were led out of the tomb again ... I felt instantly better. But something wasn't quite right. Putting my hands up to touch my face, I realised with a shock that I had lost all feeling there. It was as though I had received a particularly effective anaesthetic at the dentist, numbing it completely. The rest of my body was at normal temperature, but my face was stone cold. This feeling lasted, incredibly, for almost half an hour. (quoted in Henderson, Ghost 65-6)

A third account is given by eleven-year-old Kevin, who attended the tour on 9 April 2001. Kevin states:

> When I was standing in the tomb, something soft, like cotton-wool, was touching my eyes and cheek. There was nobody doing this to me. The next day I woke up with a black eye and scratches on my face and my neck. (quoted in Henderson, Ghost 196)

As time has gone on, the alleged poltergeist attacks have tended to "[increase] in scope and severity" and have also become "more and more frequent." As Jan comments: "We used to get one or two occurrences a month. We're now getting one or two a week." Although Jan maintains that "[n]o one's ever been seriously hurt" on the company's tours (interview), in May 2000 one tour participant had to be taken away in an ambulance when she failed to regain consciousness after a particularly violent incident (Henderson, Ghost 134).

Far from being bad for business, however, the alleged poltergeist activity has proved to be a definite "bonus" for City of the Dead as a company. As Jan puts it, "we got lucky." He describes how "I have a lot of experience as a ghost tour guide, so I can take people into a dark place and make it seem very, very scary. Obviously, in a graveyard at night, that's not going to be hard to do. But bonus, no, we never, never expected this kind of reaction" (Henderson, interview, emphasis in original).

Unsurprisingly, the activities of the Mackenzie Poltergeist have provided a source of intense fascination for locals and visitors to the city alike and the company's tour has enjoyed consistently high attendance rates. The ongoing interest of local, national and international media, as well as a variety of psychic investigators and other researchers (e.g., Allan), has ensured continuing widespread publicity, aided by the fact that the company "relentlessly make[s] sure that the papers know our every move" (Henderson, interview). The Poltergeist has thus provided the company with the competitive edge it needs to survive in the city's lucrative ghost tour market. Indeed, the case of City of the Dead provides a prime illustration of the way in which "the search for spectacle has replaced the respect for solemnity" among visitors to graveyards and other sites associated with death. As Chris Rojek comments, "the action of Modernity [has] operated to break down the barriers between the sacred and the profane, the closed world of the cemetery and the outside world of commerce and spectacle" (138, 141; cf. Linden-Ward).

However, suddenly finding itself the unofficial representative of the Mackenzie Poltergeist phenomenon, both to audiences on its tours and via the media to the public at large, has not been without its difficulties for City of the Dead. Not least of these has been the problem of how to explain the Poltergeist and its activities to these wide and varied audiences. As a result of the incidents experienced by participants on its tours, the newly-formed company found itself confronted with an urgent need to create a dramatic and believable history for the Poltergeist suitable for presentation on the tours, in its promotional materials and in its dealings with the media. This history, as we will see, has

been and continues to be (re)created in response to public fascination with the phenomenon. It has been characterised throughout by the maintenance of a compelling tension between "explanation" and "mystery" which has proved particularly effective in heightening the draw of the supernatural encounter which the company promises its audiences. This tension is encapsulated in a conversation between company cofounder Kate Kavanagh and Jan's alter-ego, Ben Scott, in Jan's book The Ghost That Haunted Itself:

> 'We'll be fine... All we have to do is tell the truth. We take people into the Black Mausoleum, things happen to them. We don't know why. We can prove they happen – we don't have to explain it.'
> 'I like explanations.'
> 'No you don't. You like mystery. You just think that everything has to have an explanation.' (Henderson, Ghost 124, emphasis in original)

During our interview, Jan accounts for the success of this tension between explanation and mystery in the construction of the Poltergeist story. He describes how "a lot of [the people who come on the tour] … accept that this thing is real and they want to know. And if you say, 'I don't have an explanation,' then it's really not good enough for a lot of people, they want one." Thus "we have to have a theory of what this thing is"; "we have to have an explanation for the visitors" (Henderson, interview). Conversely, he adds that people also "like the idea of not knowing," so that "[i]f you try and give it a rational, logical explanation, they're not pleased with that." What is needed, then, is a story of the Poltergeist which satisfies popular demand for an explanation of the phenomenon while maintaining a sufficient sense of mystery around it to ensure its continuing status as an object of fascination and fear. The section which follows presents a detailed analysis of the process by which such a story has been created within the

company's discourse, beginning with a brief historical overview of the Greyfriars site

itself and the key players in the Mackenzie Poltergeist story.

## The Making of "Mackenzie"

A booklet offering A Short Guided Tour of Greyfriars graveyard, available for

purchase in the church's gift-shop, gives the following brief synopsis of the site's early

history:

> The Kirk and Kirkyard take their name from the Franciscan friary that had
> stood [nearby] from the time of James I [1406-37] until 1558. In 1562 the
> Town Council was allowed by Mary Queen of Scots to take over the
> grounds of the former friary for use as a burial yard. The church building
> itself was not begun until nearly 40 years later and opened in 1620.
> (Greyfriars 2)

By far the most significant historical event to take place in the recently opened Greyfriars

Church was the signing of the National Covenant in 1638. The politics and religious

significance of the Covenanting movement are highly complex and have been the subject

of several historical studies (e.g., see Cowan; Douglas; Morrill, ed.; D. Stevenson). A

helpful, if simplified, summary is given in the graveyard guide:

> The [National] Covenant, signed in the first place in Greyfriars Kirk on 28
> February 1638, and subsequently in many other parts of Scotland, was a
> protest against the attempts made in the 1630s by Charles I to impose
> episcopacy and the Anglican-style liturgy on the Scottish Church, and
> against his quite unfounded claim to have the right to do so as head of that
> Church, in the same way that he was indeed head of the Church of
> England. The warfare and persecutions that ensued came to an end only in
> 1690 with the so-called Revolution Settlement, when the Church of
> Scotland in its Presbyterian form was finally recognised as the national
> Church. (5)

Greyfriars graveyard also had its part to play in the history of the Covenanting

movement.  Until relatively recently, local tradition held that "when the [church] building

could not hold the multitude" of those who came wishing to sign the Covenant, "copies

were laid on two flat gravestones" and signed in the open air outside (Watt 37).  The site

again entered Covenanting history on 24 June 1679, when "the Covenanting prisoners

taken at the battle of Bothwell Bridge [22 June] were interned in what was officially

described as the Inner or South Greyfriar Yard, where they were kept ... for a period of

nearly five months" (Bryce, "Covenanters'" 81).  At one stage during this period "there

were no fewer than 1184 prisoners" interned in Greyfriars and nearby Heriot's Hospital

(92).  Of those who refused to renounce the Covenant, many were tortured and executed,

while "some two hundred others were put on shipboard for transportation to the West

Indies, and perished when the ship was wrecked in the Orkneys" (Steele 9; cf. Bryce,

"Covenanters'" 102-3).[2]

At the time of the Covenanters' imprisonment, the Inner Greyfriar Yard, leased by

the Edinburgh Town Council under the name of "the Grassyard," was "simply a grass

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[2] Most commentators have tended to emphasise the harshness of the conditions
under which the prisoners were held.  William Moir Bryce, for example, states that "they
were kept practically without shelter ... and almost without food or water" for the
duration of their imprisonment ("Covenanters'" 81).  J. Stewart Smith comments that
they were "confined ... in a state of misery beyond description," "herded and driven like
cattle, with nothing to lie upon, and barely enough clothes to cover them" (206).  In The
Ghost That Haunted Itself, meanwhile, Jan describes their treatment as "savage"
(Henderson, Ghost 56).  Such interpretations have recently been challenged by historian
Edward Cowan, who argues that "the prisoners who had been taken to Edinburgh ...
suffered far less than has sometimes been asserted.  The confinement of the majority in
huts in a vacant walled-in part of what became Greyfriars' churchyard might almost be
considered a better fate than imprisonment in conventional insanitary and overcrowded
prisons" (100).

park of over three acres surrounded on every side by high walls." It was not until 1703
that "a strip of the western end of the Grassyard was given off by the Council to form the
southern extension of the old graveyard" (Bryce, "Covenanters'" 85-6). This area is
popularly known as the "Covenanters' Prison" to this day, though in fact it represents
only a small part of the original Inner Greyfriar Yard where the Covenanters were
incarcerated (Steuart 137; cf. Bryce, "Greyfriars'"; "Inchkeith"). It is this area, the
extension of the graveyard which "[t]radition has persistently, but erroneously, identified
… as the place of [the Covenanters'] imprisonment," that provides the location for the
culminating portion of the City of the Dead tour.[3] As local historian William Moir Bryce
describes, it is a "long narrow strip of ground," entered at its north-western end through a
"stone gateway ornamented with funereal decorations," and protected by an iron gate and
a high surrounding stone wall ("Covenanters'" 82; see Figure 4.1). In the graveyard
guide we are told that the Prison is "like a street of the dead with family lairs flanking the
central pathway" (Greyfriars 13). Jan states that it is "about 100 yards long and 20 yards
wide" (Henderson, Ghost 49).

The tomb which has become known as the Black Mausoleum, the site of most of
the activity attributed to the Mackenzie Poltergeist to date, is approximately halfway
down this strip of ground on the left-hand side. As Jan describes, it "look[s] no different
from the vaults opposite or on either side, although it [is] one of the few to have a roof"
(Ghost 194, 49). The identity of the person buried within it is never mentioned on the

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[3] This area is labelled "Covenanters [sic] Prison" by a sign affixed to the gates at
its entrance (see Figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1. The Covenanters' Prison in Greyfriars graveyard.

City of the Dead tour and is apparently insignificant to the Mackenzie Poltergeist story, at least as it is constructed within the company's discourse.

Not far from the entrance to the Covenanters' Prison, against the south wall of the graveyard, stands a mausoleum whose appearance is far more imposing. Designed and built by local mason James Smith "in the shape of a Grecian shrine," with "eight columns … covered by a heavy cupola" and "crowned with an urn," it has been acknowledged as "one of the finest in the kirkyard" and as being "of considerable architectural significance" (Lang 2; Greyfriars 12-3; see Figure 4.2). In contrast to that of the Black Mausoleum, too, the occupant of this latter tomb is central to the story of the Mackenzie Poltergeist as it is constructed within the discourse of City of the Dead.

Sir George Mackenzie of Rosehaugh (c.1636-1691), whom the author of one local history goes so far as to call "the most baffling and elusive personality in Scots history," is a man whom "[i]t is easy to describe … by antitheses" (Watt 8; Lang 6). On the one hand, he is recognised as "[a] distinguished lawyer" (Greyfriars 12), who, during his early career, defended several prominent adherents of the Covenanting movement. He was "one of [the] main promoters" of Edinburgh's Advocates' Library, founded in 1682 (later to become the National Library of Scotland), and is often credited as its founder (Cowan 158). His literary accomplishments have also attracted comment from historians. Edward Cowan writes that "[i]n McKenzie's works may be discerned the first faint indications of the [Scottish] literary revival of the eighteenth century." Cowan suggests that his work Aretina, published in 1660, represents "the earliest example of a Scottish

Figure 4.2. Mausoleum of Sir George Mackenzie of Rosehaugh.

novel."[4] Indeed, the poet John Dryden, a contemporary of Mackenzie, "conferred [on him] the title 'That noble wit of Scotland'" (Cowan 158-9).

On the other hand, Mackenzie is best known for his "vigorous prosecution" of the Covenanters during his time as Lord Advocate of Scotland from 1677-86, in the reign of Charles II. It was he who ordered the incarceration of the Covenanting prisoners at Greyfriars and who later had many of them executed (Greyfriars 12). The irony of the fact that "the foe of the Covenanters sleeps beside them" in Greyfriars, his "ponderous tomb ... insolently flaunting within a stone-throw of the Martyrs' Monument" later erected to their memory, has attracted comment in many local histories and guidebooks (Lang 1; Watt 8).

Mackenzie's persecution of the Covenanters earned him the nickname "Bloody Mackenzie" from at least the early nineteenth century. A scene in Sir Walter Scott's novel Redgauntlet, first published in 1824, shows several of the most infamous persecutors of the Covenanters gathered together at a banquet in Hell. Among them is "the Bluidy Advocate, Mackenzie, who, for his worldly wit and wisdom, had been to the rest as a god" (96). "Bluidy Mackenzie" also receives mention in Scott's The Heart of Midlothian (1818), when one of the novel's protagonists, Davie Deans, refers to a young relative of Mackenzie as "a man that has the blood of the Saints at his fingers' ends." He adds: "Didna his eme [uncle] die and gang to his place [i.e., Hell] wi' the name of Bluidy Mackenzie? and winna [won't] he be kenned by that name sae lang as there's a Scots

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[4] Mackenzie's other literary works include The Religious Stoic (1663) and Moral Essays.

tongue to speak the word?" (131). There is some evidence, however, that the epithet

originated in popular rather than literary tradition. Robert Chambers, in his Traditions of

Edinburgh (1825), describes how "Mackenzie still has a place in the popular imagination

… as the Bluidy Mackingie." He comments on the peculiar circumstance by which "[i]t

… happens that the founder of our greatest national library, one whom Dryden regarded

as a friend, and who was the very first writer of classic English prose in Scotland, is a sort

of Raw-head and Bloody-bones by the firesides of his native capital" (224).

Thanks to the experiences of participants on the City of the Dead tour, popular

interest in the person of "Bloody Mackenzie" has been renewed and intensified to greater

levels than at any time since his death. Press coverage of the incidents experienced on

the company's tours has consistently maintained that it is Mackenzie's "ghost" or "spirit

… [which] is responsible for [the] 'attacks'" on tour participants. One journalist even

draws a parallel between recent events in the Black Mausoleum and Mackenzie's

persecution of the Covenanters, suggesting that, in the experiences of tour participants,

"the terrifying events associated with [his] earlier reign of terror are repeating

themselves" (Fallis 11). The interest elicited by recent events in Greyfriars, focused as it

is on a single historical moment involving the imprisonment, torture, execution,

deportation and subsequent tragic deaths of large numbers of Covenanters, provides little

scope for a mitigating perspective on Mackenzie's character.[5] As Jan describes, interest

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[5] Recent events in Greyfriars graveyard have also prompted the dissemination of a
correspondingly positive, though equally selective view of the Covenanters as wholly
innocent victims of Mackenzie's "regime of brutality." One journalist, for example,
describes how the Covenanting prisoners at Greyfriars were "martyred most cruelly" for
"steadfastly refusing to renounce their Protestant faith" (Swanson n.p.). Historically, as

in the Poltergeist's activities "took off to an extent where ... newspapers and psychics were claiming that this thing was the ghost of George Mackenzie, the 'bloody killer.'"[6]

Significantly, however, Jan denies that City of the Dead itself has played any significant part in "painting ... Mackenzie in a bad light." He professes a personal belief that "[i]n actual fact, George Mackenzie ... was a decent guy" and expresses regret that "his name has been blackened" as a result of popular reaction to the incidents experienced on the company's tours (Henderson, interview). Indeed, in an article in Edinburgh's Evening News, Jan offers a "fairly sympathetic" perspective on the man he describes as "a very much maligned figure in history." He further points out his work as "a social reformer and philanthropist" and characterises his role in "the execution of hundreds of Covenanters" as that of an obedient subject simply "carrying out the King's wishes" (Fallis 11).

For the most part, however, the picture painted of Mackenzie within the company's discourse can hardly be said to be a positive one. Stopped in front of the Martyrs' Monument, tour guide David Pollock gives the audience of one tour I attended the following account:

> Twelve hundred of [the Covenanters] were imprisoned on the other side of the graveyard, in what's called the Covenanters' Prison. They were held

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Cowan notes, "Views about the Covenanters have oscillated between adulation and outright condemnation of the covenanting cause and its adherents. They have been seen on one hand as political extremists and as martyrs for the cause of religious freedom on the other" (9).

[6] For press coverage of the City of the Dead tour and related events in Greyfriars, see, for example, Angie Brown; Coggan; Dawson, "Fright," "Pray," and "Strong"; Fallis; Fisher; Gardner, "Colin," "Figure," "Meddling," "Psychic" and "Tourists"; Gray; Lyst; McCaffrey; McGlone; Sieveking; Swanson; and "The thing in the window."

there by George Mackenzie, who was nicknamed 'Bloody' George Mackenzie because of the way he treated them. They were kept in a walled prison without a roof. They were made to lie on the ground through a whole Scottish winter, six months of freezing cold, with very little food, no shelter, and if they moved there was snipers on the gates to shoot them dead. And if they didn't renounce their faith after being tortured, they were lined up and shot. So, Mackenzie's not a very nice guy. And he gives his name to the Poltergeist that we have in the Black Mausoleum inside the Covenanters' Prison. (Pollock, tour)

Similarly, in Jan's book The Town Below the Ground, Sir George is referred to simply as "Bloody McKenzie, the ruthless persecutor" (137). The Ghost That Haunted Itself provides a brief overview of Mackenzie's legal accomplishments and liberal background, but emphasises the fact that "[b]y the time he became Lord Advocate" he had "metamorphos[ed] from a liberal to a monster" (60-1). Despite Jan's claims to the contrary, then, evidence from within the company's discourse clearly indicates that City of the Dead is at least partially responsible for the renewed propagation of Mackenzie's "bloody" image.

Jan also asserts that the company has "always maintained that … [the Poltergeist has] got nothing to do with George Mackenzie whatsoever, we just called it the Mackenzie Poltergeist." Indeed, he even describes how "[w]e tried, at one point, to change it to the Greyfriars Poltergeist, when the whole world seemed to think it was George Mackenzie that was haunting the place.[7] But it was too late, the name had definitely stuck" (Henderson, interview). However, the assertion that the company has

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[7] See, for example, early versions of the list of Poltergeist "attacks" displayed on the company's advertising boards, which are headed: "Paranormal Sightings attributed to the Greyfriars' Poltergeist" (Henderson, "Paranormal," 24 August 2000, emphasis added). On more recent updates of this list, the word "Greyfriars'" has been replaced with "MacKenzie," in inverted commas (Henderson, "Paranormal," 15 April 2001).

"always maintained" that the phenomenon has "nothing to do with George Mackenzie" is dubious to say the least. After all, why give it Mackenzie's name in the first place if one is attempting to deny any connection with him?

One explanation is suggested by company employees' assertions to their audiences that, contrary to popular perception, "The Mackenzie Poltergeist is not named after [Mackenzie]. It's named after his tomb" (Henderson, tour, emphasis in original). Similarly, a scene in The Ghost That Haunted Itself has Jan's alter-ego, Ben Scott, insisting that "the poltergeist wasn't named after George Mackenzie, … it's named after his tomb because that's where the first attack took place" (145). However, the distinction drawn between Mackenzie and his tomb is decidedly ineffectual and unsurprisingly has done little to counteract popular belief that the Poltergeist is, in fact, the ghost or spirit of Sir George himself. Moreover, as we will see below, the story of the Poltergeist within the company's discourse establishes a number of complex links between the phenomenon and Mackenzie. In order to explore this story in greater depth and to examine the process by which it has been created and recreated in response to public fascination, it is necessary to examine how the Poltergeist has been represented within the company's discourse from the time of its establishment until the present day.

The flier used to advertise "The City of the Dead Haunted Graveyard Tour" from late 1999 through the early months of 2000 gives the following account of the origins and subsequent activity of the Mackenzie Poltergeist:

> The McKenzie Poltergeist was first reported in a small section of Edinburgh's Old Town in 1994./ There were 70 recorded sightings in 2 years – then it vanished./ In 1999 the phenomenon reappeared in a section of Greyfriar's [sic] Churchyard, now named the Black Mausoleum./ The

> McKenzie Poltergeist has been featured in local, international and scientific journals and its exploits are recorded in the book 'The Town Below the Ground.' There have even been attempts to exorcise it.[8]/ The site where it exists is now permanently locked./ And only we have the key. (City of the Dead, flier, 1999)

By summer 2000, however, a revised version of the flier was in use, which proclaims that "[t]he McKenzie Poltergeist was <u>first recorded</u> in a section of Greyfriar's Churchyard <u>in</u> <u>1999</u>" (2000, emphases added), thus effectively knocking a full five years off the life of the phenomenon (see Figure 4.3). This new, shortened history is directly contradicted, however, by references to a series of incidents which took place prior to 1999 which are also attributed to the Poltergeist. These are recorded by none other than Jan himself in the book cited on the earlier version of the flier, <u>The Town Below the Ground</u>, which was published in that year.

In this book, Jan explores a number of legends concerning the existence of an "underground city" beneath the Edinburgh streets. A chapter devoted exclusively to "The McKenzie Poltergeist" recounts around seventy incidents which took place in a set

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[8] Rev Colin Grant, a local Spiritualist minister, performed an exorcism in the Covenanters' Prison on 14 November 1999. On 26 January 2000 Grant died of a heart attack. Jan records that "[h]is son blame[d] the exorcism" for his father's death, "saying that Rev Grant admitted he had been 'greatly weakened' by the forces he had encountered in Greyfriars" ("Paranormal," 15 April 2001; cf. Henderson, <u>Ghost</u> 111-3). It appears that Grant was "invited" to conduct the exorcism by Edinburgh's <u>Evening</u> <u>News</u> (<u>Ghost</u> 111). Both the exorcism and Grant's death received widespread coverage in local and even national press, with most articles strongly suggesting a causal link between the two (e.g., see Coggan; Gardner, "Colin," "Figure," "Psychic" and "Tourists"; Lyst; McCaffrey; Sieveking; Swanson). On 26 January 2001, the anniversary of his father's death, Jan records that "Colin Grant junior attempt[ed] an exorcism" in the Prison ("Paranormal," 15 April 2001, n.p.; cf. Henderson, <u>Ghost</u> 185). However, in light of continuing incidents on the company's tours, Jan's cofounder Kate Kavanagh states that "I think it is safe to say that Colin Grant junior's exorcism has not worked" (note).

Figure 4.3. (Re)constructing the Mackenzie Poltergeist story: flier used to advertise the City of the Dead tour during summer 2000.

of underground vaults entered via Niddry Street, about half a mile north-east of Greyfriars, between 1994 and 1996. These are the same Poltergeist "sightings" alluded to in the earlier version of the City of the Dead flier (Henderson, Town 137-48; cf. Ghost 70-1). The majority of these incidents were experienced by participants on tours conducted in the Niddry Street vaults by Edinburgh-based ghost tour company Auld Reekie, for which Jan and Kate both worked as guides during the period concerned.[9] Jan's descriptions of these events in The Town Below the Ground indicate marked similarities to the types of "attack" later experienced in Greyfriars by participants on the City of the Dead tour: the majority involved sudden and intense "cold spots," often experienced in combination with a sensation of being "touched," "grabbed" or even "punched." Like the attacks in the Black Mausoleum, too, the incidents in the Niddry Street vaults appear to have grown in intensity and seriousness throughout the two-year period from 1994 to 1996, though none appear to have involved actual loss of consciousness (138-47).[10]

In the same chapter, Jan introduces "a number of theories as to just what this supernatural creature might be" (137). "Most believe," he states, that the entity responsible for the incidents in the vaults is "the ghost of Bloody McKenzie." He gives

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[9] These incidents were used by Auld Reekie until recently in promoting its tours. The company claimed that tour participants have experienced "over 70 supernatural occurrences in two years" during their visits to its section of Edinburgh's "legendary HAUNTED VAULTS" (flier).

[10] Details of the incidents in the Niddry Street vaults, along with a summary of key developments from then until March 1999, are given in the book's appendix (Henderson, Town 157-69).

weight to this interpretation by pointing out that "[Mackenzie's] house was right opposite

the site of the South Bridge," under which the Niddry Street vaults are located.[11]

However, he goes on to outline "[a] more scientific theory" which "suggests that

McKenzie is a particularly lively poltergeist." This interpretation is "backed up by the

fact" that accounts of the incidents experienced in the vaults are consistent with

documented reports of poltergeist activity (cf. Gauld and Cornell; Owen; C. Wilson).

Significantly, Jan proceeds to conflate these two contrasting interpretations of the

phenomenon, creating a synthesising narrative of its history which thus emerges as the

dominant way in which the Mackenzie Poltergeist was represented within the discourse

of City of the Dead until early 2000. He writes:

> The claim that the poltergeist and Bloody McKenzie's ghost are one and
> the same entity is borne out by similar sightings – which are even more
> disturbing and prolific – in Greyfriars Churchyard further up the Royal
> Mile. Greyfriars Churchyard just happens to be the burial place of Bloody
> McKenzie and the Covenanters he executed. (137-8, emphases added)

Thus a clear link is established between the occurrences experienced by visitors to the

Niddry Street vaults and the then incipient spate of similar incidents in Greyfriars. One

figure is used to connect the two sets of events: that of George "Bloody" Mackenzie,

whose house was located "right opposite" the site of the Niddry Street vaults and who is

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[11] Jan's claim that Mackenzie's house was "opposite the site of the South Bridge"
is consistent with the location described by Chambers in his Traditions of Edinburgh.
Chambers writes that "[t]he Abbot of Melrose's 'lodging' appears from public documents
to have been in what is now called Strichen's Close, in the High Street, immediately to
the west of Blackfriars Wynd. ... A successor of the abbot in this possession was Sir
George Mackenzie of Rosehaugh... He got a charter of the property from the magistrates
in 1677" (223).

buried in Greyfriars at the very spot where the alleged poltergeist activity was first

reported at the latter site.

During our interview, Jan explains how he first became aware of the possibility of

using the figure of Mackenzie as a means of forging a link between the events in the

Niddry Street vaults and in Greyfriars:

> The caretaker in the Greyfriars churchyard said that the first complaints about things happening [in Greyfriars] had happened outside the tomb of George Mackenzie. George Mackenzie used to live in Niddry Street [sic], which is where the underground vaults were. So it was like, 'Well, Mackenzie lived in one place, he's buried in the other, there are similar attacks in both situations.' So just for the sake of having to call this thing something we chose the only name that connected both areas, which was Mackenzie.[12]

Thus the entity deemed responsible for the incidents in the Niddry Street vaults between

1994 and 1996 was identified as the "Mackenzie Poltergeist" only retrospectively, in

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[12] The link thus forged was subsequently picked up by at least one local newspaper, having apparently been sanctioned by an "American paranormal expert," Robert Duncan Slaither. Indeed, writing for the <u>Edinburgh Evening News</u> of 3 July 1999, Russell Fallis attributes the theory linking the two sets of incidents to Slaither, not Jan. He states: "Paranormal-watchers believe the spirit of 'Bloody' MacKenzie ... was responsible for more than 70 unexplained frightening incidents between 1994 and 1996. At the time, no-one was sure who – or what – was to blame for the series of bizarre phenomena in vaults under Niddry Street.... Now an American paranormal expert believes MacKenzie was to blame for these incidents – and that he has returned with a vengeance after almost three years. On a visit to Edinburgh from the United States, R. D. Slaither noticed activity similar to that previously experienced in the Niddry Street Vaults – in the Covenanters [sic] Prison next to MacKenzie's grave in Greyfriars Kirkyard. The link to 'Bloody' MacKenzie was made because he used to live close to the entrance to the vaults..." (11). Slaither is alleged to have "investigated" the Covenanters' Prison in June 1999 and to have published findings "confirm[ing] definite poltergeist activity" (Fallis 11; Henderson, "Paranormal," 15 April 2001; cf. Henderson, <u>Ghost</u> 75-8). Despite making widespread enquiries, I have unfortunately been unable to locate him or the article he is alleged to have published. Jan confirms that the article "[said] that he thought it was a real poltergeist" (interview), but admits that "I don't know what he based that on" and is unable to locate the copy of the article given him by Slaither.

light of the events which later began to unfold in Greyfriars. In contrast, in the period during which such incidents were actually occurring in the Niddry Street vaults, Jan states that "it wasn't called anything." He makes it clear that the name "Mackenzie Poltergeist" was not introduced until after the establishment of City of the Dead early in 1999 and that "it was me that gave it the name" (Henderson, interview).

But what were the company's reasons for establishing such a connection and for identifying the phenomenon as one and the same entity as Mackenzie's ghost? One reason is suggested by Jan's repeated mention of the fact that "we had to give it a name, we couldn't just keep on calling it 'the thing'" (interview). A far more significant explanation relates to an earlier discussion in this thesis and lies in the fact that the forging of such a link makes "a damned good story" (cf. Chapter Two). It provides the Poltergeist with a dramatic and believable history which could be presented to audiences on the new company's tour. This explanation becomes particularly evident during my interview with Jan:

> The reason I've inferred that it was the Mackenzie Poltergeist in both cases [i.e., in the Niddry Street vaults and in Greyfriars] is because I was starting up a new tour company, with only a few vague stories of things happening in that graveyard, and so it was a neat way to – we had to call it something and so we implied that it might be the same thing as was in the underground city, because … there was a spate of people … collapsing and stuff in that area. And then it stopped. And then it seemed to start again in Greyfriars. So although we had no proof at all, it just seemed an obvious inference that it might be the same thing.

This statement clearly reveals City of the Dead's main reason for forging a link between the two sets of events, as a "new tour company" with "only a few vague stories" connected to its chosen location. The interpretation of the Poltergeist and Mackenzie's

ghost as "one and the same entity" even provides it with a plausible motivation "for changing sites," since, as Jan points out, "[i]t is no longer just the area where his house stood that visitors are invading. They are disturbing the very place where his body lies" (Henderson, Town 147-8). The elasticity of "facts" in the production of this narrative is indicated by Jan's assertion that the decline in the frequency and seriousness of the incidents in the Niddry Street vaults after 1996 "coincided with [the] upsurge of similar happenings in Greyfriars Churchyard" (Town 147), though in fact, as we saw above, the occurrences in Greyfriars did not begin until late in 1998. Conveniently, too, the interpretation of the phenomenon as one and the same as Mackenzie's ghost enables the company to project Sir George's long-established "bloody" image onto the phenomenon itself, constructing it as fearful and malevolent and thereby enhancing the draw of the supernatural encounter promised on its tours. In this way, then, a narrative discourse was constructed to explain the phenomenon which had recently emerged in the latter location and to provide it with a dramatic and believable history for presentation to the company's audiences.

Jan's description of the way in which the company forged a link between the sets of events in the Niddry Street vaults and in Greyfriars provides a typical illustration of the process by which the story of the Mackenzie Poltergeist was constructed within the discourse of City of the Dead. During our interview, he repeatedly compares the creation of the Poltergeist story to the process of piecing together a jigsaw puzzle. He describes how "we put this whole thing together" by connecting an assortment of fragments of information and interpretation which each "seem[ed] to be a piece of the puzzle" or

which "seemed to fit."[13]  Similarly, though there was "no proof at all" that the entity

responsible for the incidents in Greyfriars might be the same as that in the Niddry Street

vaults, it nonetheless "seemed an obvious inference" and provided "a neat way" to tie

together a number of separate events and circumstances within the framework of a

satisfying, coherent narrative (Henderson, interview).

Another articulation of the jigsaw puzzle analogy occurs in Jan's description of

the process by which he formulated his "pheromone theory."  This interprets the

Poltergeist as a cloud of energy which feeds on the pheromones generated by the fear of

tour participants (cf. Henderson, Ghost 156-60) – a theory which is used to particular

effect by the company's guides in order to build up fear amongst their audiences.[14]

During our interview, Jan describes how:

> people kept saying, 'What do you think it [the Poltergeist] is?  What do
> you think it is?'  And I got fed up of saying, 'I don't know.' .... So I think,
> 'Right, ok.  This is what's happened.'  And taking everything together and
> the fact that it seems to happen to certain types of people, [that] certain

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[13] Richard Handler and Eric Gable identify a similar analogy (or "extended metaphor") at work within the discourse of the Colonial Williamsburg living history site in Virginia.  They describe how, according to this metaphor, "the past is seen as a shattered object whose surviving pieces must be put back together like a puzzle," or "in two-dimensional terms as a fragmented picture."  As they write: "To put the puzzle of the past back together requires the problem-solving skills of a detective searching out mysteries and hunting through minutiae for clues. .... [O]ne starts with the surviving fragments and fills in the gaps between them in order to re-create a complete portrait of Williamsburg in the eighteenth century" (70-1).

[14] Jan, for example, tells the audience of one tour I attended that poltergeists are "basically like big bundles of energy.  And they feed off all the energy around them. Particularly energy from people.  Especially things like fear."  He continues: "That's why the Poltergeist wants you to be afraid.  It makes noises ... and stuff, so that you'll become afraid, you'll release pheromones, and it will get stronger."  There are surely few better ways to make an audience afraid than informing them that a malevolent supernatural entity is waiting to feed off their fear.

> tour guides seem to bring it out, that it takes ten minutes usually [from the time that the tour party enters the Black Mausoleum] before something happens – and it's just fitting it all together.  And I was like, 'Right, well, the only thing that fits is this pheromone theory.'

By "fitting together" these and other "pieces of the puzzle," Jan and his fellow guides have attempted to impose narrative unity and coherence on a phenomenon which would otherwise threaten to become overwhelmingly complex.  According to this interpretive strategy, authenticity and believability take precedence over factual accuracy: the fact that a particular piece of information "seems to fit" is more important than whether or not it can be proved to be "true."  Of the pheromone theory, for example, Jan comments that "I don't know if it's true or not but it seems to fit. …. I don't know if it's real or not, if it's accurate or if it's scientifically possible, but until someone proves otherwise, … that's what I use."

However, the actual complexity of the Poltergeist phenomenon means that it constantly threatens to escape the sense-making bounds of the interpretation thus imposed upon it.  On several occasions during our interview, when mentioning an element of the Poltergeist story which "seems to fit," Jan goes on to cite a possible "flaw in the argument" or exception to the rule which calls into question the fit of that particular "piece of the puzzle."  He thereby implicitly acknowledges the limited success of the company's attempts to contain the phenomenon within a single interpretive narrative.  For example:

> [the] pheromone theory …. probably doesn't [fit].  If you were a real scientist you could probably find flaws in the argument.  But as a layman's argument it fits … better than anything else I've heard. (Henderson, interview)

> poltergeists … usually [have] a focus and that focus is usually one person. …. Which kind of fits. Except that we come in with different people every night. So … if we have to have an explanation for the visitors, it is the fact that certain types of people bring this thing out. But that it's become strong enough that it's a presence anyway. (Henderson, interview)

Another significant factor which has influenced the piecing together of the Mackenzie Poltergeist puzzle is that Jan admits to having mislaid a few of its pieces. As he explains, "in putting the tour together, I have always been deliberately vague to add to the mystery. The less hard facts I actually had, the less questions I had to answer" (Henderson, e-mail, 29 May 2001 [2]). In a similar way, pieces of the puzzle which no longer "fitted" – or were simply no longer required – have also been quietly discarded. This explains why the Niddry Street connection was subsequently dropped from the Poltergeist story. As time has gone on, stories of incidents taking place in Greyfriars itself have rapidly increased in number and become anything but "vague." Thus, the Niddry Street connection has gradually been downplayed and seemed to have all but disappeared from the company's discourse by the time I commenced my field research in June 2000. It has given way to the dramatically abbreviated history of the Mackenzie Poltergeist on the revised version of the company's flier, where the phenomenon does not emerge until 1999 and in Greyfriars rather than Niddry Street.

To be precise, this new, abbreviated version of the Poltergeist story begins on 19 December 1998, the date of an incident described on City of the Dead's regularly updated list of "Paranormal Sightings Attributed to the 'MacKenzie' Poltergeist" as "[t]he accidental desecration of George MacKenzie's tomb" (Henderson, "Paranormal," 15 April 2001). That this incident marks the starting-point of the new Poltergeist story

within the company's discourse is clearly indicated by its placement as the opening entry

on the "Sightings" list, effectively obliterating all record of the phenomenon prior to this

date. It was this new version of the Poltergeist story which was being presented on the

company's tours by the time of my field research. On a tour I attended on 7 July 2000,

the tour party gathered in the dark, cramped space of the Black Mausoleum. At this

point, Jan gives his audience the following account of why the company believes that the

Poltergeist activity began in this particular area:

> the reason we think it started here is because round the corner is George
> Mackenzie's tomb. And this actually happened. Just over a year ago.
> George Mackenzie's tomb is like this, except it's bigger. And it has holes
> in – it's got a big iron door and a little grille that you can look through and
> holes in the floor to let the rain out. And about – just over a year and a
> half ago, I think, a homeless guy came into the graveyard late at night –
> it's raining, he wanted to get out the rain. He crawled through one of the
> holes and he got into George Mackenzie's tomb.
>
> Now, this guy's only got a flashlight, that's all. But he sees a grille on
> the ground, he lifts the grille up, there's a flight of stairs. He goes down
> the flight of stairs, under the tomb, and he finds George Mackenzie's
> coffin, along with his family, they've been there since 1691.[15] Now, what
> does this guy do? He decides he'll break into Mackenzie's coffin to see
> what's inside. What does he <u>think</u> is inside? Mackenzie's inside, that's
> who's inside. So he gets a big bit of wood and he's going, [pounding
> sounds], on the coffin lid.
>
> Meanwhile, out at the church itself, the caretaker comes out to look
> round for the night. He's got his dog with him. It's pitch black, and what
> does he hear coming from inside George Mackenzie's tomb? [Pounding
> sounds.] The caretaker doesn't want to investigate this [laughter]. His
> <u>dog</u> doesn't want to investigate this [laughter]. But it's their job, so they
> get the flashlight and go up to the – they're like Starsky and Hutch, up to
> the tomb. Gets to the door. Looks in. Nothing.
>
> Meanwhile, underneath, this homeless guy is still battering on the
> tomb [sic]. He steps backwards and he takes a step onto a piece of
> wooden floor, which is rotten, and he went right through. There's another
> room underneath, a second one. And I've been down there, I've seen it,

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[15] "Inside [Mackenzie's tomb], set in the floor, is a grating which gives access to a
crypt where the family coffins were placed" (<u>Greyfriars</u> 13).

I've taken photographs of it. It's one of the illegal dumping-grounds for the bodies.[16] That's where they stuck 'em, underneath George Mackenzie's tomb. There are dozens of them down there, they've been down there for about two hundred years, there's no light, very little air, and they haven't decomposed. They're covered in green slime. And he landed in them. Arms, legs, heads, the works.

Meanwhile, upstairs, the caretaker's looking through Mackenzie's tomb, now, like this, into it. When suddenly, the homeless guy is there, 'Aaargh!' like that [laughter]. He's covered in green slime – he wasn't too pretty to begin with [laughter] – and he's like, 'Waaargh!' The caretaker flies backwards down the stairs. His flashlight rolls away, it lights up the hole. Now the homeless guy is climbing out of the hole in the ground, in a graveyard [laughter], covered in green slime, and going, 'Uh, uh, uh!' The caretaker thinks it's a zombie [laughter]. He runs, the dog runs. The homeless guy runs [laughter], they're all running out of different exits.

Now, can you imagine the fear you'd feel if you fell through the bottom of a tomb and landed in a pile of rotten bodies. Or the fear you'd feel if you were standing inside a tomb and something crawled out of a hole in the ground towards you [laughter]. The pheromones these guys released must have been astronomical. And the sightings of the Mackenzie Poltergeist started a week later. (Henderson, tour; cf. Ghost 31-9)

This story stands out from the majority of those told about the Poltergeist on the City of the Dead tour because of its highly patterned, legend-like structure. It contrasts strongly with the looser, more anecdotal form typically used by the company's guides in describing the Poltergeist's activities. Moreover, it contains an usually high concentration of evaluative devices which indicate its teller's commitment to the narrative's veracity (or at least the commitment he wishes to convey to his audience). Jan frames his narrative with statements which make his reason for telling this particular tale explicit. In opening, he introduces the narrative as an etiological story which explains

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[16] Earlier in the tour, Jan has informed his audience that "eventually there were so many bodies in [Greyfriars], they couldn't bury anyone here anymore…, so they started to dump the bodies in illegal dumping-grounds" (Henderson, tour).

why "we think [the Poltergeist activity] started here." In closing, he emphasises the fact that "the sightings of the Mackenzie Poltergeist started a week later." He also places a strong emphasis on the narrative's factual status ("this actually happened") through the use of a number of authenticating devices such as the provision of a specific temporal context; detailed description of the physical features of his setting and of his protagonists; and personal testimony as to the narrative's veracity: "I've been down there, I've seen it, I've taken photographs of it." Although the story is told with considerable humour, the message Jan wishes to communicate to his audience is clear: while the caretaker mistakes the homeless man for a supernaturally reanimated corpse, the real point of the story is that the combined fear of the two men gives birth to a genuine and far more sinister supernatural entity, inside the tomb itself.

Significantly, this story was told to Jan as a personal experience narrative by the caretaker who features in the incident described. This is the same man who told him about the other mysterious occurrences in Greyfriars prior to the establishment of City of the Dead and who suggested the Covenanters' Prison as a possible location for the tour. Although he has presumably embellished it considerably to arrive at the version performed on the tour, Jan obviously believes that this particular incident took place more or less as related above. During our interview, he reconfirms the essential details of the story and provides some additional contextual information:

> the bodies are down there, I've got a photograph. … But … nobody knew they were there until this guy fell through the floor. And the police came in, had a look in the tomb, said, 'Aw, alright,' and left. And they're still there, because this gentleman [the caretaker], when he left Greyfriars, gave me the key. And I'm not supposed to have it, but I do have it. So of

course, the first thing I did was check and make sure the bodies were still there, they <u>are</u> still there.  So yeah, that happened.  (Henderson, interview)

Notably, then, it is the existence of the bodies in the chamber underneath the tomb – as investigated by the police, witnessed by himself and evidenced in the photograph he took – which Jan uses to verify that the events described in the narrative "happened."  In contrast with the tone of the narrative as he tells it on the tour, he is equivocal in interpreting the incident as the cause of the subsequent poltergeist activity.  Although he confirms that "according to this caretaker..., it was right after that [incident] that people started to complain about" an intense cold, sickly sweet smell, nausea and unexplained noises in the area of Mackenzie's tomb, he admits that "I can't honestly say that that's [what started the poltergeist activity]" (interview).  Instead, like the other elements used in constructing the Poltergeist story, it merely "seems to be a piece of the puzzle."  As Jan states: "it's a matter of putting two and two together. …. [I]t seems to fit. … I couldn't tell you if it was actually true or not, but because we have to have a theory of what this thing is and we're using the pheromone [theory] – if you're using it then that actually would make logical sense."  Jan also admits that he "made up" the date of the incident in Mackenzie's tomb as 19 December 1998, explaining that "[the caretaker] didn't tell me a date.  He just said it had happened 'a wee while ago'" (e-mail, 29 May 2001 [1]).[17]

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[17] Unfortunately, it has not been possible to consult the caretaker himself about his experience.  Jan mentions that "I used to see him around all the time" but that "[o]ddly enough, he vanished just over a year ago … and nobody seems to know where he has gone" (Henderson, e-mail, 25 May 2001).  As for the homeless man, Jan states that "we know the guy fell through the floor into the bodies, but we don't know who he is.  We know he was a homeless guy, that's all" (interview).

Significantly, the founding narrative of this new version of the Poltergeist story has the advantage of enabling the company to link the phenomenon to a longstanding local supernatural belief and legend tradition centring on Mackenzie's tomb. As tour guide David Pollock tells the audience of one City of the Dead tour, "there's been rumours going around that [Mackenzie's tomb]'s been haunted" for "a long time." This can almost certainly be attributed largely to the popular perception of Mackenzie as a "bloody killer." The earliest available reference to the existence of such a rumour is found in the poem "A Kirk-Yard Eclogue" (1779), by Edinburgh poet Robert Fergusson. Fergusson's poem takes the form of a conversation between two ghosts as they wander in "the Grayfriars, whare, at mirkest hour,/ Bogles [ghosts] and spectres wont to tak their tour." In the final stanza, the ghostly narrators contemplate "travel[ling] to [Mackenzie's] vau't wi' stealin stap [step],/ And wauk[ing] Mackenzie frae [from] his quiet nap" (Garioch 33, 36).

Nineteenth- and early twentieth-century local histories and guidebooks to the city also yield evidence of a longstanding local belief that the tomb was haunted. Chambers, writing in 1825, states that the tomb "was an object of horror to the good people of Edinburgh, as it was almost universally believed that the spirit of the persecutor could get no rest in its superb but gloomy tenement" (224). A century later, Mary Steuart writes that Mackenzie "was supposed to arise from his huge mausoleum and wander, a restless, tormented spirit, among the graves" (138). Samuel Dunlop, meanwhile, claims that "[n]o grave in the Churchyard, perhaps in any churchyard, has gathered round it such superstitious terrors" (29; cf. "Inchkeith" n.p.).

Two particular traditions appear to have developed reflecting a belief in the hauntedness of the tomb.  The first of these is described by Chambers as follows:

> It used to be a 'feat' for a set of boys, in a still summer evening, to march up to the ponderous doors [of the tomb] … and cry in at the keyhole:
> > 'Bluidy Mackingie, come out if ye daur,
> > Lift the sneck and draw the bar!'
> After which they would run away as if some hobgoblin were in chase of them, probably not looking round till they were out of the churchyard. (224-5)[18]

The text of the rhyme quoted by Chambers varies little across the several accounts of this tradition given in comparable local histories and guidebooks.  Most authors recount the tradition as fact, though one, Francis Watt, voices a suspicion that the anecdote is "half mythical."  Nonetheless, Watt goes on to suggest that it was by means of the above "feat" that the epithet "Bloody Mackenzie" came to be established in the popular imagination (8).

The second tradition concerns the adventures of one James Hay, whose story has recently resurfaced in publications by Mercat and Witchery Tours (Wilson et al., Ghostly 75; Mitchell 6).  Hay is known to have escaped from Edinburgh's Tolbooth jail, where he had been indicted for highway robbery, in November 1783.  Writing in 1912, Watt describes how after his escape:

> [Hay] hid himself in 'Bluidy Mackenzie's' tomb, held as haunted by all Edinburgh.  He was an 'auld callant' [i.e., former student] of Heriot's Hospital [a local boys' orphanage and school], which rises just by old Greyfriars', and the boys supplied him with food in the night-time.  When

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[18] See also Dunlop 29; Greyfriars 12-3; Lang 2; "M." 58; J. Smith 203-4; R. L. Stevenson 59; and Watt 8.

the hue and cry had quieted down, he crawled out, escaped, and in due time, in was whispered, began a new life under other skies. (279)[19]

In most versions of the legend, Hay remains in the tomb and is fed by his former schoolmates for a period of around six weeks (Dunlop 30; Chambers 94; J. Smith 204). Chambers claims that the tomb was already widely "supposed to be haunted by the spirit of the bloody persecutor" prior to this incident (93; cf. J. Smith 204), while Watt suggests that the story of Hay's occupation of the tomb resulted in "the ghostly reputation of that stately mausoleum" becoming "more firmly established than ever" (279). Steuart believes that Mackenzie's tomb was the perfect choice for a hiding-place since, because of its haunted reputation, it was "not a place that would be searched, and any movement or noise heard in that neighbourhood would be attributed to the restless spirit of the Lord Advocate himself." She is therefore of the opinion that "the story ... is not as unlikely as it sounds" (138).

Employees of City of the Dead are aware of both of the above traditions and the latter was recounted by Kate during two of the tours I attended as part of my field research. In Kate's version, the protagonist's name is John Hayes and the length of time he spends in the tomb is six months rather than six weeks, after which he flees to America. Significantly, in an apparently innovative ending to the legend which adds much to its haunting effect, Kate concludes her story by stating that "[w]hen John Hayes finally made it to America, he was completely insane." She adds that "[s]pending six

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[19] See also Chambers 93-4; Dunlop 29-30; J. Smith 204; Steuart 138; R.L. Stevenson 59; Wilson et al., Ghostly 74-5; and Mitchell 6.

months inside Mackenzie's tomb would do that to the hardiest of people, I can assure you. It is <u>horrible</u>" (Kavanagh, tour, emphasis in original).[20]

The story of the Mackenzie Poltergeist as it is constructed within the discourse of City of the Dead exists in a complex relationship with pre-existing local belief and legend traditions.[21] Drawing on the same themes – "Bloody" Mackenzie, the haunted reputation of his tomb and accounts of supernatural activity within it – it adapts them to suit an entirely new performance context. In the process, it subjects them to complex processes of (re)creation, recontextualisation and commodification. The earlier accounts also lend the Poltergeist story an added air of authenticity and believability. They enable the company to present the Mackenzie Poltergeist phenomenon as a continuation of a local supernatural folklore tradition, thereby enhancing the "discursive authority" of its own account (see Briggs 449; cf. Chapter Two). Thus appropriated, such traditions become yet more "pieces of the puzzle" to be fitted together in the company's construction of the Mackenzie Poltergeist story.

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[20] In contrast, some earlier versions, such as Smith's, suggest that by the time Hay "escaped abroad" he had become "a wiser and a better lad … after undergoing … forty-two nights of darksome misery in constant dread of the appearance of some uncanny spectre" (J. Smith 204).

[21] Another supernatural rumour relating to the tomb which is mentioned within the company's discourse, but to which I have been unable to find any reference elsewhere, claims that "whenever you go in there, Mackenzie's coffin is always in a different place" (Kavanagh, tour; cf. Henderson, <u>Town</u> 152).

## Performing the Poltergeist

In this section, I turn my attention to the ostensive dimension of the Mackenzie Poltergeist story as it is constructed within the discourse of City of the Dead, that is, to the process by which both guides and audience members engage in the active performance or enactment of the story through their participation on the company's tours. I consider in particular the relationship of the City of the Dead tour performance to another activity of especial interest to the folklorist: that of the teenage legend-trip. Bill Ellis defines the legend-trip as a "ritual visit to an allegedly haunted or marginal site," often a graveyard, which "normally involves the ostension, or literal acting out, of local supernatural legends" ("Legend-Trips" 67).[22] Several commentators have interpreted the legend-trip as "a sincere effort to test and define boundaries of the 'real' world" (Ellis, "Mock-Ordeal" 488). Kenneth Thigpen, for example, observes that it demonstrates "a strong impulse toward the active experiencing of legend phenomena" and provides an opportunity for participants to "verify for themselves the reality of the supernatural occurrences described in the legends" they tell (207).

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[22] Linda Dégh and Andrew Vászonyi, whose article on ostensive action as a means of legend-telling was the first to apply the concept to folkloric communication, define ostension as a form of communication involving "presentation as contrasted to representation (showing the reality itself instead of using any kind of signification)." Thus ostensive action is "the showing of an action by showing the action itself or by another action" (7-8). The authors identify the legend-trip as a particularly prominent form of contemporary folkloric ostensive action. Though they do not use the term itself, their description of "nocturnal visits to a haunted place well-known in the community – house, bridge, tunnel or cemetery," involving "carloads of young people" motivated by a desire "to experience a 'good scare' or to carry out a pranking, mischief-making expedition," clearly refers to the legend-tripping phenomenon (18, 20).

Parallels between certain forms of contemporary touristic activity and that of the legend-trip have already been noted by Sylvia Grider. Grider argues that "[t]he various popular guidebooks describing local haunted sites and inviting tourists and others to visit them ... are a popular culture phenomenon related to legend tripping behaviour because they are ... based on the premise that, under the right circumstances, perhaps one can personally encounter a ghost or other supernatural being" (186). This observation can also clearly be applied to the case of City of the Dead. The company's tour differs significantly from those operated by any of the other ghost tour companies I studied in that it is predicated almost entirely upon the possibility of a genuine, firsthand encounter between the members of the tour party and a demonstrably harmful supernatural entity. As part of each tour performance, the company's guides not only relate the story of the Mackenzie Poltergeist to their audiences but also frame the whole performance as a literal acting-out of the story by its participants. Indeed, in the event that an actual poltergeist "attack" occurs during a given tour, these narrative and performance frames collapse into one another, generating a new episode of the Poltergeist story which can then be narrated to the audiences of future tours. In this way, as Linda Dégh and Andrew Vászonyi state, "not only can facts become narratives, but narratives can turn into facts as well" (5).

In the structure of the City of the Dead tour, moreover, the three "scenes" of the legend-trip are clearly identifiable (Ellis, "Mock-Ordeal" 487; cf. Meley 2; Thigpen 204-5). Firstly, "experienced group members tell newcomers about the reputation of a local haunted place": in the case of City of the Dead, the company's guides tell their audiences

the story of the Mackenzie Poltergeist en route to the Black Mausoleum. The function of this "scene" may also be fulfilled prior to the commencement of the tour itself through the exposure of potential audience members to the company's promotional materials and media coverage of the Poltergeist's activities. The second scene of the legend-trip occurs when "the group goes to the spot and invokes the supernatural by prescribed rituals." Thigpen describes this as "the most crucial part of the legend performance," during which "participants [attempt] to merge the supernatural realm described in the first part with reality" by "act[ing] out the specified requirements to cause the fulfilment of the legend" (205). In the case of City of the Dead, this crucial second scene is realised through the tour performance itself and especially the journey to the Covenanters' Prison and Black Mausoleum.

Thirdly, "after retreating to 'safety,' the group shares perceptions of what uncanny events actually occurred" (Ellis, "Mock-Ordeal" 487). In a similar way, after each City of the Dead tour, audience members are usually invited to join their guide in the safety of a nearby pub, where they typically discuss whatever "uncanny events" they experienced during the tour. Indeed, those members of the party who experienced or witnessed an "attack" may be asked at this point to write down a description of their experience which may be incorporated into future versions of the Poltergeist story. In a similar way, as Thigpen writes: "Individual exploits and observations on the nature of the phenomena encountered" during the legend-trip may thereafter "be added to the basic legend complex," being "told as memorates to the uninitiated" during future trips (205-6; cf. Meley 18).

Lastly, the tour also shares what Gary Hall calls "the 'scariness' of the legend trip," which results "not only [from] legend content" but is also manufactured through a combination of several additional factors, including: "1) the foreboding appearance of the legend site, 2) legend-telling, and 3) the atmosphere of tension and uncertainty generated by the trip." Like legend-trip participants, both guides and audience members on the City of the Dead tour "cultivate an atmosphere of fear" in the process of "seek[ing] out contact with the supernatural and attendant dangers" (Hall 255). Whether or not an "attack" actually occurs during a given tour, the success of the performance depends primarily upon the rhetorical and other techniques employed by the guides to create and maintain an atmosphere of excitement, anticipation and often genuine fear amongst their audiences. Using a variety of such techniques to effect a gradual build-up in intensity throughout each tour performance, particularly after the tour party's arrival in Greyfriars graveyard, the company's guides effectively frame the Poltergeist as an object of simultaneous attraction and fear.[23]

Like the majority of Edinburgh's ghost tours, the City of the Dead tour begins on the Royal Mile and features early stops in Parliament Square by St Giles' Cathedral and in two of the Old Town closes. Typically, too, the stories told during the first half of the tour deal generally with "gruesome" social history, including accounts of trials and

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[23] Because I did not actually witness an "attack" on any of the six City of the Dead tours I attended, it has not been possible to undertake detailed analysis of the effects of such an occurrence on the tour party and the nature of the performance as a whole. In the pages which follow, therefore, I focus primarily on the performance techniques employed by the company's guides to produce an atmosphere of fear amongst their audiences, rather than on tour participants' firsthand encounters with the Poltergeist.

punishments for witchcraft and the lack of sanitation in old Edinburgh. Such stories are told with considerable humour, eliciting frequent laughter from the audience. However, the style and tone of the guides' discourse shifts dramatically on the tour party's arrival at Greyfriars graveyard, where they are to spend the entire latter half of the ninety-minute tour. The nature of this shift is clearly intimated to audience members in the introduction to one tour I attended, when our guide, David, offers the following synopsis of what we are about to experience:

> First of all, I'm going to take you round the Royal Mile a little bit and have a bit of a laugh. Because we don't want to be scared stiff for an hour and a half solid. So we'll have a bit of a laugh and then we're going to make our way down to Greyfriars kirkyard, where it gets a little bit more eerie. (Pollock, tour)

The shift from the light-heartedness of the first half of the tour to the "eerieness" of the time spent in the graveyard closely parallels the structure of the legend-trips analysed by Patricia Meley. Meley writes that "the mood … as the trip begins is often rowdy and excited," as participants "laugh and joke and talk about general topics." As the group approaches the legend site, however, "the mood grows more serious" and by the time they have arrived at the site, the participants have become "engrossed with the situation" and their mood is "quiet, tense and apprehensive" (13).

On the City of the Dead tour, this shift in atmosphere is marked by the use of a number of verbal and other framing devices concentrated around the moment when the tour party enters the graveyard. Jan states: "enough messing around, we're going to the graveyard now!" while David tells his audience: "we've had a bit of a laugh so far, been quite light-hearted and that, but now we're in the graveyard, this is the really scary bit"

(Henderson, tour, emphasis in original; Pollock, tour). In addition, it is not until entering the graveyard that audience members are asked to pay for the tour, a device which both frames the remainder of the performance as the experience which is really worth paying for and implicitly asks them to demonstrate their commitment to going through with whatever lies ahead. It thereby strengthens the tour party's sense of itself as a group in the face of impending danger.

As they progress through the site, this sense of "group solidarity" (Hall 232) is further encouraged by the guides' repeated insistence on the importance of "sticking together" as a means of protection against attack by the Poltergeist. Jan's warning that the Poltergeist "is more likely to pick off somebody who is standing away from the crowd" is particularly effective in causing the members of his audience to move closer together, though they may laugh at themselves for doing so (Henderson, tour). Similarly, David tells his audience that "I need you all to … take a note of who your pals are and make sure they don't go wandering off. And if you're on your own, stick next to someone and make sure someone knows you're there. … Because I want everyone coming out again" (Pollock, tour).

After their arrival at the graveyard, the tour party is subjected to a condensed and intensified recapitulation of the shift from light-heartedness to "eerieness" which has accompanied their transition from the city streets to the graveyard itself. This is signalled to audience members as they enter the site by Jan's explanation that "[t]his is not the locked bit, this is just the graveyard entrance; the locked bit is <u>further in</u>" (Henderson, tour, emphasis added). In this way, he creates a sense that the tour party is penetrating

ever deeper into an enclosed, and enclosing, unknown space. This sensation is reinforced by the experience of passing through a series of gateways into increasingly enclosed spaces, from the graveyard itself with its high surrounding wall (see Figure 4.4), to the narrow enclosure of the Covenanters' Prison, to the claustrophobic confines of the Black Mausoleum. Each set of gates is first unlocked to allow the audience to pass through and then locked again behind them, simultaneously creating contradictory impressions of privileged access and entrapment.

On one occasion, after the tour party has crammed into the Black Mausoleum, Jan even closes the gate in their faces from the outside, symbolically imprisoning his audience within the tomb. He goes on to exacerbate the sensation of entrapment by informing them that their only possible escape route – the doorway of the Mausoleum – is also the zone in which the Poltergeist is most likely to attack. Indeed, the imagery of locks and keys, access and entrapment, is used repeatedly within the company's discourse as a means of placing literal and symbolic boundaries around the Poltergeist and thereby constructing it as an object of simultaneous attraction and fear. Its flier reads: "The site where it exists is now permanently locked./ And only we have the key"; "Ever been locked in a graveyard at night with an active poltergeist?/ You won't forget it" (City of the Dead, flier, 2000).

A parallel can be drawn here with the process of "sight sacralization," a concept introduced by Dean MacCannell to refer to the way in which objects and locations are "mark[ed] ... off as tourist attractions." As part of this process, MacCannell writes, a particular attraction may become subject to "framing," a device which involves "the
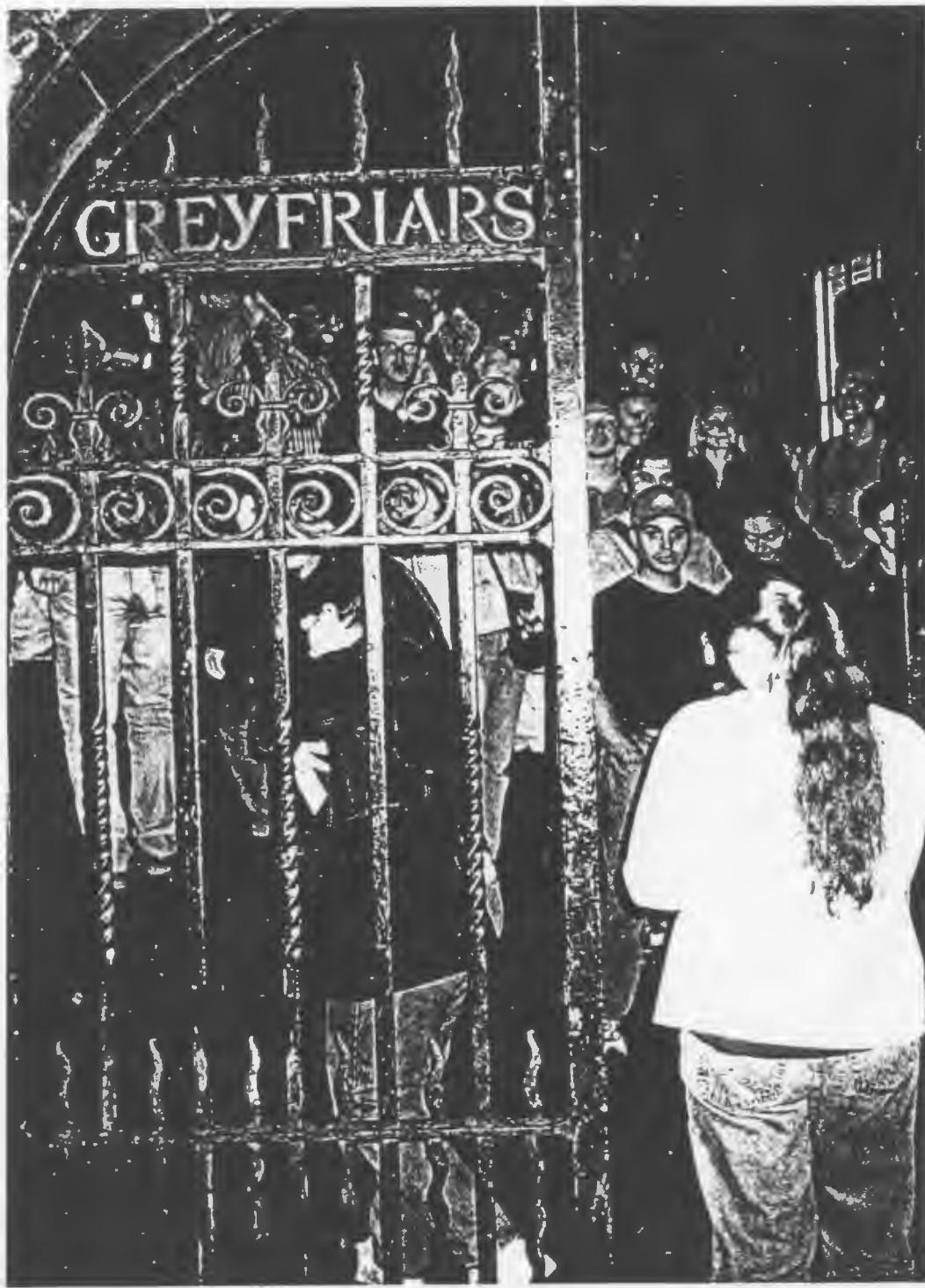
Figure 4.4. "only we have the key": City of the Dead tour party inside the gates of Greyfriars graveyard.

placement of an official boundary around [it]" in order both to protect and enhance it

(Tourist 44-5). As we have seen, the use of framing in this sense can clearly be identified

in the context of the City of the Dead tour. The literal and symbolic use of locks, keys

and enclosures within the company's discourse also exemplifies a further stage of the

sight sacralisation process, that of "enshrinement." This typically occurs "when a tourist

attraction contains within its boundaries an even more valuable attraction" (Fine and

Speer 82). Significantly, in their application of MacCannell's sight sacralisation model to

the case of the guided tour, Elizabeth Fine and Jean Haskell Speer note that enshrinement

is often effected by "movement from an outer physical space to an inner sanctuary" (86).

In this case, the tour party moves to the Black Mausoleum. The City of the Dead tour

also accords with Fine and Speer's suggestion that "one would expect the revealing of

enshrined objects and subjects to take place toward the middle or end of a tour." It

illustrates the way in which "[t]his placement of enshrinement in the order of events

provides a sense of climax" to the tour performance and a feeling of "growing

involvement and intensity" amongst its participants (92).

The tour enters Greyfriars graveyard through a little-used gate in the north-west

corner and takes a circuitous route around the site before leaving through the main, south-

eastern gate, making a total of eight stops along the way (see Figure 4.5, letters a to h).

This route, which avoids the better lit, more widely used parts of the site where traffic

and other outside noise is more clearly audible, makes the graveyard seem much larger

than it actually is and creates a sense of being in a "liminal" world apart from normal

space and time (cf. Meley 16; Stewart 40). At the time of the tour party's arrival at the

Grounds of
*Heriot's Hospital*

*LINE OF*

WEST YARD

49

50

S

E

*Line of
Telfer
Wall*

**F**

41

**F**

**G**

SOUT...

46 47

44 45

"HEICHE"

48 FLODDEN

25

**E**

**D**

W

N

site of
*Franciscan
Friary*

Burial
Yett

36

33

*OR OVIR*

35

*FIRST*

18

17

27

26

*BURIAL*

16

15

14

13

31 32

**KIRK**

**A**

34

*KIRK*

30

11

"CAUSAY" 162

34 1

YARD

**H**

29

52

28

**C**

9

10

**B**

*site of
Bristo Port*

2 3 4

5 6 7

8

*Candlemaker Row*

George IV Bridge

**LEGEND**

Stop A: Inside Burial Yett (north gate)
Stop B: Martyrs' Monument
Stop C: Grave of John Gray
Stop D: "Rogues' Gallery"
Stop E: Outside entrance to Covenanters' Prison
Stop F: The "Bones" Tomb
Stop G: Black Mausoleum
Stop H: Inside main gates

**MAP OF GREYFRIARS KIRKYARD**

*showing the location of sundry tombs and monuments*

Figure 4.5. Into the unknown: map of Greyfriars graveyard showing route taken by the City of the Dead tour (map source: <u>Greyfriars</u> 8-9).

graveyard, it is nearing 10.45pm and even during the summer months, what daylight

remains is fading fast. By the time the group has reached the Covenanters' Prison (at

around 11.15pm), it is almost completely dark and their way is lit only by a pair of

flashlights provided by their guide. Thus, the sense of advancement into the unknown is

further reinforced by the gradual falling of darkness during the tour party's passage

through the site (cf. Hall 234-5).

The group's eventual destination, the Covenanters' Prison, is closer to the well-lit

main entrance of the graveyard and the busy main street onto which it opens than the gate

they entered. However, audience members do not discover this fact until the very end of

the tour, when their exit from the site takes them directly from the Prison to the main

gates. On the group's arrival at the graveyard, in contrast, the guides construct a

conceptual map of the site which reinforces the impression of movement from the safe

and familiar to the unknown and potentially dangerous. When they are standing just

inside the graveyard entrance, Jan informs his audience that:

> The graveyard is divided into three sections. …. It's just coincidence, but
> it's just that more nice guys are buried on this side, and there's more bad
> guys over there. And the Poltergeist is at the back. …. So we're going to
> go to the nice bits, go round to where the bad guys are and then right to the
> back where the Poltergeist is, by which time it should be quite dark.
> (Henderson, tour)

George Mackenzie and the Covenanters are introduced to the audience while the

tour party is still in the "nice" section of the graveyard, during a stop which takes place in

front of the Martyrs' Monument which commemorates the Covenanters (see Figure 4.5,

letter b; Figure 4.6). Significantly, however, the Poltergeist itself is not reintroduced until

the fourth stop, which, appropriately, takes place in the "bad" section of the site (see

Figure 4.5, letter d; Figure 4.7). The guides dub this area "Rogues' Gallery," because, as Jan explains, "there are a bunch of villains buried around [it]" (Henderson, e-mail, 17 January 2001). When the party is stopped in this area, Jan indicates to his audience that there is now no turning back by informing them that "[f]rom this point on, the Poltergeist knows you're coming. It just knows. The next stop is the Black Mausoleum and that's where it is" (tour).

In fact, there are usually two more stops between "Rogues' Gallery" and the Black Mausoleum. During the first of these, which takes place immediately in front of the gates to the Covenanters' Prison, the Poltergeist becomes the main focus of the guides' discourse for the first time on the tour. Here they take the opportunity to tell their audiences "a little bit about poltergeists" before the tour party enters the Prison. A number of significant rhetorical and other framing devices are used during this stop in order to prime the audience for their potential encounter with the Poltergeist. Thigpen notes that the legend-trip is conducted "in a manner that will heighten [the audience's] anticipation…, thus enhancing the receptive psychological state of all involved" (205). This is true of the ghost tour as well and both Kate and David choose this stop to outline a number of differences between poltergeists and ghosts, a device which appears calculated to make the latter seem harmless and benign in comparison with the invisible, malevolent entity lurking in wait beyond the Prison gates. As Kate explains:

> Poltergeists are not ghosts. Ghosts haunt places and are linked to people in those places. You can see them. They appear and disappear, they wander around a bit. They generally don't come near you and they can't hurt you. Poltergeists, although they are present in places, actually haunt people. They feed off your energy, particularly off your fear. You cannot see them, and they can hurt you. (Kavanagh, tour, emphasis in original)

Figure 4.6. The "nice" side of the graveyard: City of the Dead tour party stopped in front of the Martyrs' Monument.

Figure 4.7. "From this point on, the Poltergeist knows you're coming": City of the Dead tour party stopped at "Rogues' Gallery."

During this stop, too, the guides explain to their audiences "what an 'inductor' is," in such a way as to emphasise still further the Poltergeist's status as an object of fear and danger. Kate, for example, states that "[w]hen we get down there [into the Black Mausoleum], if anyone on this tour is an inductor, they will know about it and so will everybody else. It's like being a huge poltergeist magnet, the Poltergeist will go for you big-time" (Kavanagh, tour). Jan warns his audience that "[i]f you don't know what [an inductor] is, it doesn't mean you're not one" and assures them that "[i]f you are an inductor and you go into the Black Mausoleum, [the Poltergeist] will attack you" (Henderson, tour, emphasis in original).

Also during this stop, the guides describe to their audiences what to expect and how to react if they fall victim to a Poltergeist "attack." Two basic scenarios are outlined. The first type of attack is described as "like being mugged by something you can't see" and participants are warned: "You might feel like you're being pushed or shoved or scratched ... by something that's not there." Audience members are instructed to inform their guide immediately should any of them experience such a sensation. In the second type of attack, the victim is subjected to a "cold spot." The audience is told that if the spot on which they are standing "suddenly become[s] absolutely freezing," they must "take a step away from it" – "especially if you feel sick at the same time" – otherwise they will "probably fall unconscious." In both cases, the guides repeatedly stress to their audiences that the party will leave the Prison immediately should an attack occur. Jan states that: "If [you are attacked] I have to know, and I will get you out" (Henderson, tour). David assures his audience that: "If anyone feels remotely dodgy in there, we're

getting out" (Pollock, tour). The severity of the attacks described and the solemn tone in which the guides deliver such advice to their audiences contribute still further to the framing of the Poltergeist as an object of fear within the discourse of the tour.

A further significant framing device occurs towards the end of this stop, immediately before the tour party proceeds to enter the Prison. Audience members are instructed to raise their right hands and to "swear that if anything happens to me in the Black Mausoleum, I will not hold City of the Dead tours responsible" (see Figure 4.8). This device also does much to intensify the "atmosphere of fear" amongst the audience.[24]

Inside the Prison, there is usually one more stop before the Black Mausoleum itself. At this point, the guides conduct what Jan describes as "a small experiment." A member of the tour party (usually a young female) is asked to enter one of the tombs in the Prison, to reach into a small recess in the back wall and to bring back to the group whatever she discovers there. The object is then revealed as a human bone. As Kate explains, "there's about 250,000 people buried here in Greyfriars. They're all on top of each other in a big heap. When it rains a lot of the bones get pushed back up to the surface like this fine specimen that we have here" (Kavanagh, tour). Jan goes on to explain to his audience the point of the "experiment" just conducted:

> This thing [the Poltergeist] concentrates on two tombs. .... This is one of
> its favourites. And the other one is down at the bottom [i.e., the Black
> Mausoleum]. It's not in here. Because you went in, on your own, you
> touched its bone – which it loves [laughter] – and you came back out, and
> nothing happened. So it's not there. It's in the one at the bottom. Which

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[24] The extraction of this "oath" from the audience also has a practical purpose. As Jan states, "We've no idea what the insurance position is on something like [this]" (Henderson, interview).

Figure 4.8. "I swear that if anything happens to me in the Black Mausoleum, I will not hold City of the Dead tours responsible."

is unfortunate, because the one at the bottom is smaller.  But you're all going to fit.  (Henderson, tour)

The claim that the "bones" tomb is "one of [the Poltergeist's] favourites" seems unlikely, since it is doubtful that the guides would send a member of the audience into it alone were this indeed the case.  Certainly, as David states during our interview, "I've never had anyone feel anything there" (Pollock, interview).  In fact, the experiment conducted in this tomb functions primarily as a particularly effective performance technique which creates the impression of heightened danger where no such danger actually exists.  As we saw above, Jan does not explain the "point" of the experiment to his audience until after his chosen "volunteer" has returned unharmed, bearing "the Poltergeist's" bone, thus proving that "[i]t's not in here."  By creating a belief amongst his audience that one potential site of confrontation with the Poltergeist has thereby been eliminated, he intensifies the already considerable aura of fear which has been constructed around the Black Mausoleum itself.

The incident in the "bones" tomb thus bears close parallels to the kinds of rituals undertaken by participants in legend-trips as they "act out the specified requirements to cause the fulfilment of the legend" (Thigpen 205).  Like the incident in the "bones" tomb, a key function of such rituals (which may include the touching of a particular gravestone, walking a prescribed number of times around a reputedly haunted site, or entering such a site unaccompanied) lies in the contribution they make towards the required "atmosphere of fear" amongst the trip's participants (e.g., see Hall 232; Thigpen 205).

The gradual build-up of anticipation and fear which began at the very beginning of the tour and intensified after the tour party's arrival at the graveyard is thus brought

close to climax. Moments later, Jan informs his audience: "This bit where you are is the heart of the Black Mausoleum" (Henderson, tour, emphasis added), the centre or crux of the tour. He adds: "It doesn't look like very much, I wish it'd picked a nicer one, but this is the one." Significantly, by stressing the ordinary, unassuming appearance of the Mausoleum, he implicitly enhances its status as an authentic "back region" which has not been subject to "staging" in order to make it more attractive or impressive. He thus emphasises the reality of any unusual occurrences which may be experienced within it (cf. MacCannell, "Staged" 595-8, Tourist 98-102).

Inside the Mausoleum, the guides continue to reinforce the sense of heightened danger amongst tour participants by relating a series of experience narratives concerning incidents which have occurred on previous tours, in order to give their audiences "an idea of what kind of things poltergeists are capable of doing." Both the content and the structure of these narratives are designed to effect a gradual build-up of tension and anticipation in the listener. Jan's, for example, chart the dramatic growth in the frequency and seriousness of the alleged poltergeist attacks over time, particularly since the commencement of the company's tours:

> as we [started taking the tours], the attacks built up, quite quickly. This is no longer [a] case of something watching or following you, it now does things to you, and of course, everything that happens, happens to people on the tours, because we're the only people that come in here. ... [A]nd we bring in so many people more than there would normally be, and so the attacks have got bigger and bigger and bigger. ....
> [T]o begin with, it was minor stuff, people complained of things touching their face, touching the back of their head. Then we started to get phone-calls the next day, ... saying, 'I woke up the day after the tour, my face is covered in bruises, I'm covered in cuts.' .... It's gone from strength to strength since then, knock-outs are now its favourite. .... The

attacks have become more and more spectacular as time has gone on, and they've increased [in frequency], as well.  (Henderson, tour)

Kate achieves a similar build-up of tension and expectation with her description of the "five stages" or "levels" of poltergeist activity and of the escalation in power and violence which marks the transition from each level to the next:

> Level one is known as the 'senses attack.'  It's … where you start hearing strange noises, perhaps voices.  It then moves up to level two, which is known as 'communication.'  Voices get a bit louder, clearer, more distinct.  You might start to experience mild cold spots. …. [T]he poltergeist then moves up to level three, which is known as 'electrical control.'  This is where you <u>know</u> there is something going on that is not quite right.  You've got lights turning on and off, doors locking and unlocking, objects moving around, maybe disappearing and appearing somewhere else.  Cold spots can start getting worse. ….
>
> Now, the poltergeist then moves up to level four, which is known as the 'trickster stage.'  That's the stage we think the Poltergeist is at here in Greyfriars.  It's starting to get bigger now, it's more powerful.  It's starting to get a bit of a knowledge about you.  It knows what kind of things it can do to scare you…  [At] this stage, you can start experiencing mild physical attacks.  You might feel something touching you, maybe grabbing you or pushing you. …  You might get out of the tomb and find that you've got scratches on parts of your body that you've maybe not actually felt getting while you're in here.  You can also start feeling nauseous and dizzy.  Cold spots can start getting really severe.
>
> Now, after this stage … the poltergeist then moves up to level five, which is known as the 'danger level.'  As far as I know, the Poltergeist in Greyfriars hasn't reached level five yet.  It could get there at any moment.  When it does, I shall probably choose an alternative career. … When it gets to level five, you start experiencing serious, violent physical attacks.  You're also looking at things like possession, levitation, fire-starting, writing appearing on walls and floors…  (Kavanagh, tour, emphasis in original)[25]

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[25] Kate later told me that she had learned about these five levels from a website, though she could not remember which one.  I have since located several versions of the model online (e.g., see "The Five Levels of a Poltergeist," http://www.monstrous.com/Ghosts_/Definition_of_a_Ghost/definition_of_a_ghost.html/).

In both of the above examples, the build-up in the intensity of the poltergeist activity depicted in the guides' narratives is reinforced structurally by a gradual convergence of the narrative and performance frames.  This creates an uneasy sense that whatever is experienced on the present tour will provide the culminating episode in the narrative.  A parallel can be drawn here with Susan Stewart's observations on the nature of the horror story.  As Stewart writes: "Unlike other narrative forms, where we can distinguish between the reader's [or audience's] time … and the narrative, or sign time…, in the horror story audience time and narrative time collapse into each other as the storyteller proceeds," so that "[t]he listener's welfare becomes increasingly implicated" (33-4; cf. McDowell 128).  The effect is to "underscore the position of the audience as victim" of the narrative, as the context of the narration is "subsumed under the influence" of the narrative and is "accomplished – given a horrible life – by the story" (39-40).

A rhetorical technique which Jan uses at this point in his performance provides a particularly clear illustration of the way in which the company's guides manipulate and distort "the facts" in order to heighten the atmosphere of fear amongst their audiences. Immediately after explaining his "pheromone theory" to his audience (see above), Jan tells us that the Poltergeist "takes about ten minutes to attack, because it basically builds up on your fear, that's how it works."  A few minutes later he reminds us: "It takes about ten minutes to attack," offering his assurance that "I have this timed to perfection.  I know exactly when to leave."  When we have been in the Mausoleum for precisely 11.2 minutes (according to the tape counter), he again assures us: "I know we're getting near

to ten minutes now, so I'm going to get you out in a minute, because I know that's when it starts. Sometimes I time it wrong, and that's when something tends to happen." Then again, after 13.9 minutes in the Mausoleum: "Anyway, I try and make you laugh there, because that dilutes the [pheromones]. But it's almost ten minutes, so we're not going to hang around here much longer" (Henderson, tour).

In total, the group has spent 15.2 minutes inside the Mausoleum, yet Jan succeeds in creating in his audience a belief that they have "got out" in the nick of time. As he states: "I have this timed to perfection." His repeated mention of the ten-minute watershed heightens the audience's awareness of the passage of time itself and invests it with a sinister significance that ensures that their sense of fear and anticipation intensifies with each passing moment. As a performance technique designed to heighten the atmosphere of fear amongst tour participants, the success of this device lies in the creation of a frightening perception of time amongst the audience and bears little relation to the actual length of time which the tour party spends in the tomb.

Kate concludes her performance in the Black Mausoleum with the following summary of the events described on the tour:

> We have had a lot of really strange things happen down here. This place is seriously haunted. I mean, if you think about it, probably four to five thousand people in Greyfriars were actually buried alive.[26] Twelve hundred Covenanters were imprisoned down here, in atrocious conditions, they were all [sic] lined up against the wall and shot. And now we seem to have a poltergeist down here as well. In my opinion, that makes this a pretty haunted place. I think you would be extremely hard pushed to find

---

[26] Earlier in the tour, the guides mention that an estimated two percent of the 250,000 or so people buried in Greyfriars were buried alive. As David explains: "You didn't need a death certificate to be buried in those days. ... People were that scared of illness, you just had to look dead and they would bury you."

> anywhere more haunted than this anywhere that you go in Edinburgh, if not even the rest of Britain; it is seriously scary. There is absolutely no way that you would catch me coming down here on my own, not even like in the daytime – (Kavanagh, tour)

At this point, Kate is interrupted in mid-sentence by the appearance of a masked figure clad in black who comes running, screaming, into the tomb. By this stage, the atmosphere of fear has been built up to such an extent that it takes some time for the audience's screams to turn to laughter and eventually to die down.

The use of a "jumper-outer" at this climactic point in the tour, especially given the emphasis placed by the company on the genuineness and potential harmfulness of the supernatural encounter it promises, raises important issues concerning the authenticity and credibility of the guides' discourse. Perhaps in recognition of this, Jan is careful to tie in the appearance of the jumper-outer with his theory that the Poltergeist feeds on the fear generated by tour participants. As he tells his audience: "I think some of you have missed the point, here, haven't you? He has jumped out. He's given you a big fright. You've released pheromones. Now it knows you're here, so now, we're getting out" (Henderson, tour). Similarly, in the aftermath of the jumper-outer's appearance on his tour, David urges his audience that "I think we should go now, before anything does happen" (Pollock, tour).

Indeed, comments made during interviews suggest that this may not simply be a performance technique calculated to re-establish a degree of credibility in the wake of the "fake" scare provided by the jumper-outer. Rather, they suggest that the guides themselves accept the potential reality of the Poltergeist and the possibility that the pheromones generated by the jumper-outer's appearance may put the audience in genuine

danger. Jan, for example, stresses the fact that the jumper-outer arrives "right at the very end, just in case." He comments: "If this thing is real and the pheromone theory is correct, then the last thing you want to do is have him jump out halfway through the tour and have all these pheromones floating about for this thing to pick up. So we're right out after that's done" (Henderson, interview).

Nonetheless, the use of the jumper-outer on the City of the Dead tour highlights a fundamental difference between the ghost tour and the legend-trip. The tour is a commodified performance: audience members on the company's tour are required to pay for the chance of an encounter with the Mackenzie Poltergeist. In contrast to legend-trip, where participants are usually closely interconnected, the ghost tour is characterised by the existence of clearly marked distinctions between guide and audience. Moreover, while in one sense the tour may function like the legend-trip, which Ellis describes as "a sincere effort to test and define boundaries of the 'real' world," it is much more clearly framed as "entertainment" for all those involved ("Mock-Ordeal" 487-8). As David comments: "people ... want to go on these tours to be entertained, they don't want ... to be scared witless for an hour and a half. ... They like to have a laugh" (Pollock, interview). Similarly, Jan explains that:

> what [people] want, when they come on a ghost tour, is entertainment...
> You get some people who come on the tour because they've read about
> this thing and they really are fascinated by it. But other people, the fact
> that it turns out to be real is a bonus for them, that's not why they came,
> they just wanted to have fun; and they're the majority. And they would
> feel let down if you simply talked and talked and said, 'Right, that's it.'
> .... People who really, really do believe in this thing and are interested by
> it, yes, when the person jumps out, they're like, [disappointed] 'Awww.'
> But then they'll come and get me and they'll say, 'Is it real, it is real?'

> And I'll say, 'Yeah.' And I explain…, 'He's there to give you a fright in case nothing happens, but the thing is real.' (Henderson, interview)

The use of the jumper-outer prompts comparison with dramatic performances such as the mock-ordeals analysed by Ellis which are regularly performed at summer camps in the United States. Ellis defines such performances as "contrived events in which a group of campers and counsellors venture out to challenge supernatural beings, confront them in consciously dramatised form, then return to safety" ("Mock-Ordeal" 487). He goes on to describe how events such as the mock-ordeal "test the boundaries of 'life' and 'theatre' by staging actions that the players represent as real and that the audience overtly accepts as such," yet whose "proper function … is not fulfilled unless all participants recognise it as fiction" (486-7). Similarly, Hall argues that "[t]he 'scariness' of the legend-trip does not mean that adolescents necessarily believe in the revenants and assorted horrors of their legendry. Rather, during the legend-trip, during the process of legend-telling, they simply do not disbelieve. Questions of actual belief or non-belief are largely irrelevant during the drama and excitement of the trip." In other words, in order "[t]o make the trip scary and fun," legend-trip participants "willingly suspend disbelief in supernatural haunts and other horrors" (Hall 255, emphases in original; cf. Dégh, "Haunted" 80-1).[27]

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[27] Although Hall observes that "[t]he fear generated during the legend-trip is not feigned" and that the reactions displayed by participants (including "bravado" and "aggression") "reflect the development of very real apprehensions" during the approach to the haunted site, he points out that participants "do not all believe – when questioned in another context –" in the supernatural horrors awaiting them on the trip (255).

Thus it would seem that we can interpret the response of audience members on the City of the Dead tour as a form of "engrossment" or "suspension of disbelief," rather than genuine fear and/or belief. This would explain the most commonly observed reaction to the appearance of the jumper-outer: a combination of disappointment and relief at the realisation that the promised supernatural encounter has been substituted by a "fake" scare. As Jan states:

> people want to get a fright. We can't depend on the Poltergeist doing something to somebody. And in actual fact, when it does, although it's very good for business, ... the tour [participants] sometimes don't particularly appreciate it! But the jumper-outer, that's a different matter entirely, they get a gigantic fright ... but seconds later, they're quite well aware that it's not real. ... And the idea is, we keep him ... till the last second of the tour. And that's the total climax that you want. ... [W]hat they get is a genuine fright, I mean a real one. They've laughed for quite a bit of the tour and had a good time. But it's a ghost tour. And I think you should provide one huge fright at least. (Henderson, interview)

Thus it could be argued that, as Sabina Magliocco observes of visitors to the haunted house, what tour participants express is more akin to the "enactment or ... parody of fear" exhibited by audience members on tours operated by Witchery Tours, than it is to genuine terror (Magliocco 24; cf. Chapter Three).

However, such an interpretation is strongly contradicted by the message communicated to audience members by the company throughout its performances. In the company's promotional materials and during the tours themselves the focus is on the genuineness and potential harmfulness of the promised encounter with the Poltergeist and on the frightening nature of the company's tours as a whole. As Jan comments: "we stress very strongly on the leaflets, on the board, everywhere, that 'this thing is real, you can be hurt, don't come on the tour unless you're prepared to accept that'"; "We don't

really mince words about, you know, 'This is scary'" (Henderson, interview). On the company's website we are told: "Be warned! The tours are at night, the McKenzie Poltergeist is real and, once you are in the Black Mausoleum, it all gets very scary indeed" (City of the Dead, http://www..blackhart.uk.com/). Similarly, its flier alerts potential audience members to the fact that "[t]he ... Poltergeist can cause physical and mental distress" and warns that "[y]ou accompany the tour at your own risk." Among the items displayed on the company's advertising boards during summer 2000 were a five-page list of "Paranormal Sightings" experienced by tour participants; a montage of newspaper articles detailing the Poltergeist's activities to date; lists of carefully selected quotations from reviewers describing the tour as "utterly terrifying" and professing "100% Belief"; and a sign offering "danger money" to anyone "brave" enough to sign up as a guide with the company (see Figures 4.9-4.11). Audience members are thus left in little doubt as to the potential dangers of participating on the company's tour.

This message continues to form the focus of the guides' discourse throughout the tours themselves. "I warn you, if you are a sceptic, that this thing is real," Kate tells her audience in the opening minutes of one tour, "People have left our tours on stretchers in the past" (Kavanagh, tour). Standing outside the gates to the Covenanters' Prison, Jan informs his audience that "[w]hether or not you believe in this kind of thing is now immaterial. ... [I]t is real and I do warn you of that now" (Henderson, tour). Similarly, David urges that "I'm not telling you stuff from books I've read. ... I've never read anything about poltergeists in my life. ... This is from what I've experienced in here" (Pollock, tour).
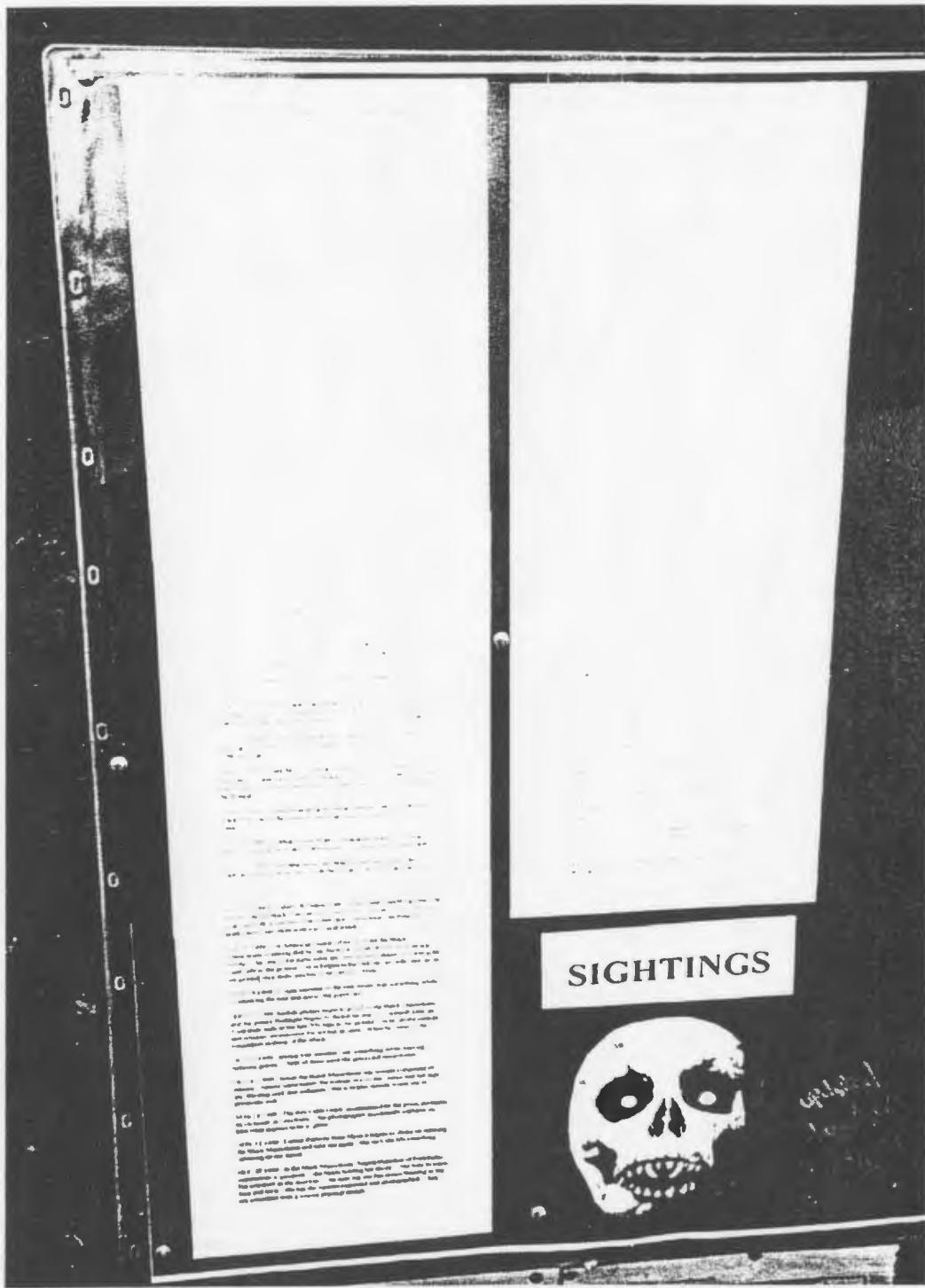
Figure 4.9. "this thing is real": list of "Paranormal Sightings attributed to the [Mackenzie] Poltergeist" posted on City of the Dead's advertising boards.

Figure 4.10. "Tourists feel force of the phantom menace": press coverage of the Poltergeist's activities on the advertising boards.

Figure 4.11. "danger money": a sign advertising for guides "brave" enough to work for the company.

That this emphasis on the genuineness and potential harmfulness of an encounter with the Mackenzie Poltergeist is not simply a rhetorical device used by the company's guides to elicit desired responses from their audiences became evident to me on one of David's tours which I attended on 29 July 2000. On this occasion, the tour progressed more or less routinely until the party arrived outside the gates to the Covenanters' Prison. However, thereafter the event was effectively re-framed as a "real" frightening experience rather than a performance or "game." David was already noticeably shaken following the events of his earlier, 8pm tour (which I had also attended), during which one audience member had collapsed and another claimed to have felt something grab her ankle as she left the Black Mausoleum. By the time the tour party arrived at the Prison on the 10pm tour, then, he was convinced that "it's going to be a pretty weird night." He became visibly very nervous about what might be awaiting us in the Black Mausoleum and even gave repeated opportunities for audience members to leave the tour before the party entered the Prison, assuring us that "if you're not up for it, … [t]here's a gate that's open, you can just get straight out that way if you want. …. So if anyone wants to leave, I would do it now. There's no shame in it at all." Moreover, once inside the Prison, he refused to lock the gate behind us as normal, stating that "I'm not going to lock the gate, because if we need to get out, then we need to get out."

An incident which occurred just after the tour party entered the Prison further suggested that, on this occasion at least, David's fear was not simply part of his

performance.[28] As the party walked towards the Black Mausoleum, I overheard him asking an audience member for a draw of his cigarette, commenting that "I'm just really uptight now." This exchange was clearly not intended for the general audience and was not part of a "performance" of any kind. Although David urged the party to "stay light-hearted," that this was "entertainment" and that we were "here to have fun," his fear had communicated to the audience and the sense of terror amongst the group by this point was almost palpable. Shortly afterwards, David concluded his narrative in the Black Mausoleum with a personal testimony: "I had a meeting with my boss [i.e., Jan] yesterday. I actually didn't want to do these tours anymore…, because I was scared stiff. I come from a religious background … and it's scared me witless" (Pollock, tour).

During our interview the previous evening, David had told me that although "I love doing the tours, …. I believe in a spiritual world where things that we don't understand exist. And I'm quite wary of messing with things like that. …. I wouldn't try and summon anything that I didn't know about." When asked whether he thought that he might in some way be "summoning" a supernatural entity by taking tour groups into the Black Mausoleum, he expressed some concern that this might indeed be the case, although ultimately he concluded that "I don't think I am" (Pollock, interview). Thus, for at least one of the company's guides, conducting tours to the Black Mausoleum is not simply a performance, but an experience which involves genuine fear and deep-rooted

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[28] We may compare Auld Reekie tour guide Gavin Bolus's admission that "[o]ccasionally I've tried … to be a bit more sinister than usual or a bit more scared than I actually feel. Almost as if I were trying to tell people that, 'This is too frightening for you, don't come along'" (interview).

ethical and religious concerns about the potential consequences of "invoking the

supernatural."

Similarly, judging by their responses to the tour, it appears that audience members

are not simply expressing an "an enactment or … parody of fear." This is evident in

several of the accounts quoted in Jan's book The Ghost That Haunted Itself, in which

audience members of past tours describe the shift in their attitudes which took place as

they approached the Covenanters' Prison and Black Mausoleum. Most, like Jan

Adamson-Reese, whose account of being attacked in the Mausoleum was quoted in the

introduction to this chapter, profess to having spent the first hour or so of the tour

convinced "that the entire thing was a huge charade, a complete fabrication, dreamed up

to con unsuspecting tourists" (quoted in Henderson, Ghost 73). Subsequently, however,

their attitudes to their experience began to change, even for those who, unlike Jan, were

not themselves victims of "attacks."

When Charity Pirkle and her friend Adrian (from Atlanta, Georgia and

Birmingham, Alabama) decided to attend David's 8pm tour on 29 July 2000, they went

"expecting to learn some history and hear some scary stories." Charity comments that

although they were "a little nervous" as the tour party entered the Covenanters' Prison,

"that was why we were there, to be frightened, in a fun way. Neither of us thought that

there would actually be an encounter with the Mackenzie Poltergeist" (quoted in

Henderson, Ghost 87). However, by the time the tour party left the Black Mausoleum,

she states that "I was … scared half to death." She claims to have heard what she

describes as an echo reverberating off the back wall of the tomb which continued even after David had stopped speaking. She continues:

> as I set my left foot out of the tomb something grabbed my right ankle. It felt like a man's hand in a thick glove or something, very soft. It didn't feel like it was trying to keep me in there, it was just reaching out. 1/2 hour later, my ankle had a small thin bruise running all the way around it. (Pirkle)

Roy Hutchison, from Leeds, attended the tour on 15 November 2000. He states:

> I have never been interested in the supernatural and tend to think it's all a lot of rubbish. I came on the City of the Dead tour because I was interested in the history of Edinburgh and of Greyfriars, and I enjoyed that part. The supernatural stuff was well done, I suppose, and the stories were good fun but … there was no way I was going to believe in any of it… In the Black Mausoleum … I thought to myself … how daft it was that people acted that way [i.e., scared, nervous] in the dark.

However, Roy describes how, a few moments later, he felt "something very cold [grab] my hand and let go again," even though "[t]here was nobody else near enough to touch me." His reaction: "I jumped but didn't say anything. I thought it had to be a trick, but I couldn't work out how it was done."[29] Roy concludes his account by stating:

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[29] Such assumptions that the guide is "hyping" the situation or relying on "tricks" or "special effects" are common amongst the tour's audiences. David, for example, gives the following account of an incident which occurred on one of his tours: "I've heard banging noises from underneath the tomb, underneath the ground at the back…. And there was like almost a groan… There was a really low, deep, very long exhaling noise, that I wouldn't have actually put down as human, myself. … And I switched the light on and I said, 'Right, ok, no messing around now, you dinnae want to scare the tour guide too much, or else that's not good for anyone.' And just sort of made light of it. And everyone …. looked at me blankly, because they were scared. Right at the end, there was two Edinburgh boys who'd been on the tour came up to me and said, 'How did you do that? Have you got a speaker in the ceiling or something like that? And a button to press?' I was like, 'No.' They said, 'Aw, you do really.' … And I said, 'You can come on the next tour I do and if you hear that noise again, then fair enough, but I've never heard that before'" (Pollock, interview).

> When I came out of the vault I looked at my hand. There was a two-inch cut down the back of it. Not a scratch – a deep cut, which was bleeding badly. Later I took a photograph of it. I have gone over and over this in my mind. Though I am totally reluctant to say this was something supernatural, I can come up with absolutely no logical explanation for how it could have happened. (quoted in Henderson, <u>Ghost</u> 138)

Like the audience members quoted above, Sarah Wilson, who attended the tour with a friend in October 2000, comments that "[we] had no pre-conceived notions of the tour content and we assumed it would be just some actor telling us well-rehearsed stories." She states: "When we approached Greyfriars Churchyard we were fairly geared up for the horrors that awaited us in the haunted tombs, though we really didn't expect anything to happen." By the time the tour party reached the entrance to the Covenanters' Prison, however, she remembers that "the fear amongst us seemed very strong" and that none of the audience members "felt embarrassed, as we all appeared to be feeling the same dread." Despite witnessing the collapse of a female audience member outside the Prison gates, Sarah describes how she and her friend decided to continue with the tour, commenting that "the realisation [that] there might actually be something supernatural here after all fascinated us so much that we had to find out more" (quoted in Henderson, <u>Ghost</u> 127-9).

## Conclusion

For each of the above audience members, then, by the end of the tour the experience had indeed become "a sincere effort to test and define boundaries of the 'real' world" (Ellis, "Mock-Ordeal" 488). Their experiences illustrate the way in which an

encounter with the Mackenzie Poltergeist, whether at firsthand or mediated by the tour guides' discourse, may result in a paradoxical combination of fascination and fear which provides the key to the attraction of the City of the Dead tour. Participants respond to the company's discourse of fear that offers its audiences the experience of being "locked in a graveyard at night with an active poltergeist."

Having created its own legend in response to public fascination with the Mackenzie Poltergeist phenomenon, City of the Dead provides the Poltergeist with a dramatic and believable history while maintaining a careful balance between "explanation" and "mystery" which enhances the draw of the supernatural encounter that the company promises its audiences. Significantly, it is a narrative that intersects with pre-existing local belief and legend traditions concerning supernatural activity in and around George Mackenzie's tomb. It thereby provides an illustration of the ways in which local folkloric traditions may come to be used and adapted within the touristic context. The construction of the Poltergeist legend depends on a process of piecing together assorted fragments of information and interpretation, a process in which the fact that a particular piece of the puzzle "seems to fit" is more important than whether or not it can be proved to be true. Indeed, "the facts" may be manipulated and even invented in the interests of creating a coherent and engaging narrative.

As part of the company's performances, tour participants literally act out the Poltergeist legend through their journey to the Covenanters' Prison, in a manner similar to how participants in the teenage legend-trip "test and define boundaries of the 'real' world" by "seek[ing] out contact with the supernatural and attendant dangers" (Ellis,

"Mock-Ordeal" 488; Hall 255).  The ghost tour differs from the legend-trip in that it is a commodified performance characterised by clearly marked distinctions between guide and audience and involving the confrontation of "supernatural beings" in "consciously dramatised form" (Ellis, "Mock-Ordeal" 487).  However, what tour participants express is not simply "an enactment or a parody of fear" (Magliocco 24) but is, in many cases, quite genuine fascination and even terror at the prospect of a firsthand encounter with the supernatural.

Using a variety of performance techniques to effect a gradual build-up in intensity throughout the tour, particularly as the party approaches the Covenanters' Prison and Black Mausoleum, the company's guides frame the Poltergeist as an object of simultaneous attraction and fear.  A continual emphasis is placed on the genuineness and potential harmfulness of the promised supernatural encounter.  The City of the Dead tour thus provides a particularly revealing illustration of the role of fear within the ghost tour discourse.  It also offers an insight into contemporary society's fascination with the supernatural in general and the ways in which sites associated with death may come to be interpreted and commodified as objects of touristic visitation.

# Chapter Five: CONCLUSION

As a discourse analysis of three Edinburgh-based ghost tour companies, Mercat Tours, Witchery Tours and City of the Dead, this thesis has explored the attitudes, values and aesthetics of each company – what Mercat's Frances McBrierty refers to as its "ethos" (interview). It has also revealed both conscious and subconscious messages through which each company constructs and presents particular images of itself to both its internal and external audiences, not only in the context of its tours themselves but also through the many different forms and types of communication it generates in the course of its activities. Throughout, my approach has been informed by Handler and Gable's conception of the heritage site as "a social arena in which many people of differing backgrounds continuously and routinely interact to produce, exchange and consume messages" and by their emphasis on the need to study "the social processes of message making" in this context as a topic of investigation in their own right (9, 11).

The ghost tour as a genre of touristic performance rose to prominence over the last three decades of the twentieth century and developed intensively in cities such as Edinburgh, York and London in the UK and New Orleans in the USA. Establishing a clear definition of such tours and outlining their key characteristics provides a firm basis for future research into this distinctive and growing touristic form. Focusing on Edinburgh, I argued in Chapter One that ghost tours represent one of many possible "touristic discourses" on the city's past (Dahles 228), constructing a history which is almost exclusively violent, gory, superstitious, unsanitary and disease-ridden and which

appears to have become a widely accepted version of Edinburgh's past in the popular imagination. This discourse contrasts with that constructed by the many daytime, "history" tours also conducted in the city, which present an almost diametrically opposing version of local history, focusing primarily on "life and achievement" (Kauppi 9-10). Building on the work of Dahles and Urry, I suggest there is considerable scope for further research into the interconnections of such "touristic discourses" as constructed within a single geographical space such as Edinburgh. Exploring the contrasting images of that space, an issue dealt with only briefly here, would undoubtedly be a rich study in itself.

The tours examined in this thesis were shown to be part of a much wider trend within the contemporary heritage industry, whereby, as Lowenthal comments, the "infamies [of the past] are exaggerated" to the exclusion of its more "benign" aspects (Foreign 345). Recent scholarship on the significance of death and the macabre as a motivation for visitation to tourism sites provides a theoretical framework to explain this phenomenon (e.g., see Deuchar; Lennon and Foley; Phipps; Rojek; Seaton; Smart). For example, Lennon and Foley's concept of "dark tourism" is of particular relevance in this context, as is Seaton's work on "thanatourism," in which he traces a number of historical links between thanatopsis (the contemplation of death) and tourism from the Middle Ages onwards. In particular, Seaton traces a movement from the solemn, spiritual contemplation of death as evidenced in the Medieval pilgrimage, to the reframing of death as "heritage, education, or history" in the face of the "state-regulated segregation and professionalization of death and dying" within twentieth-century Western society

(Seaton 236, 244; Phipps 83). This shift has paved the way for the presentation of death as entertainment in the ghost tour context. More work remains to be done on the significance of entertainment, as opposed to remembrance and education, as a motivation for visitation to dark tourism sites, of which the ghost tour is a prime example (see Foley and Lennon, "Dark" 155).

Rather than dealing exclusively with the supernatural, as their name suggests, I argued that most ghost tours also draw extensively on the general social histories of the locations in which they operate. In fact, a total of three "ingredients" were identified as central to Edinburgh's ghost tours: "history," "humour" and "horror." Together these characteristics form a conveniently alliterative emic recipe for ghost tour success. Although most ghost tour operators exhibit some level of concern with all three of these ingredients, individual companies frequently develop "specialities." Each of the companies selected for consideration in this thesis has based its identity around a different one of the ingredients outlined above. Thus Mercat Tours, which advertises that all its guides are "university-trained historians" and is widely perceived both internally and externally as "the historically accurate one," represents history. Witchery Tours, which offers its audiences "a light-hearted look at Edinburgh's darker side," represents humour. And, finally, City of the Dead, which promises the experience of being "locked in a graveyard at night with an active poltergeist," represents horror. In this thesis I have analysed each of these three key aspects of the ghost tour discourse in turn, through an investigation of the ways in which each manifests itself within the discourse of one

particular tour operator.  That said, it should be noted that elements of all three ingredients are incorporated to some extent within the discourse of each company.

Chapters Two and Three offered an extended comparison of the discourses of Mercat and Witchery Tours.  This analysis related the discourses of these two companies to wider themes within the literature on contemporary tourism.  In Mercat's case, I drew on the conceptualisation of tourism as a modernistic "quest for authenticity" (MacCannell, Tourist) and in Witchery's, that of postmodern- or post-tourism as "play." Each chapter began by tracing the development of the literature on its respective theme before applying the concepts discussed to an analysis of the case study itself.  Thus Chapter Two began by surveying recent scholarship on the concept of authenticity in tourism, from the cognitive objectivist approach which informs the work of MacCannell, Boorstin and others, to the constructivist approach which guides my own analysis of the Mercat Tours discourse.  Bruner's identification of multiple meanings of authenticity as constructed by employees at the New Salem living history site in Illinois, and his conception of authenticity as a "struggle" characterised by "paradoxes, ambiguities, and ironies" among these different meanings, was cited as being of particular significance in this context (405).  Bruner's work directly informs the analysis of the Mercat Tours discourse presented in the remainder of the chapter, which examined three distinct but interrelated conceptualisations of authenticity as they are constructed and presented by the company.

Firstly, the conceptualisation of authenticity as originality enables the company to claim authentic status for its performances by virtue of its position as Edinburgh's

longest-established ghost tour operator: "the ORIGINAL and the BEST!" (Mercat Tours, "Corporate"). The company also traces this claim considerably further back in time by consciously "reinventing" the "tradition of <u>cadies</u>," a society of men who guided visitors around the city in centuries gone by. It thereby enhances the authenticity of its own performances by imbuing them with the "symbolic value" of the reinvented tradition (Handler and Linnekin 273). Perhaps the most salient conceptualisation of authenticity within the company's discourse, meanwhile, is that of <u>authenticity as historical accuracy</u>. The company employs a rhetoric of history as consisting of "just the facts" (Handler and Gable 78) in order to position itself in opposition to the practice of "making things up" allegedly indulged in by the city's other ghost tour operators. This claim conveniently glossing over the processes of selectivity, interpretation and even invention involved in the production of the history presented on its own tours. In this sense, I argued, "the issue of authenticity merges into the notion of authority," which, as Bruner states, "is a matter of power – or … who has the right to tell the story of the site" (400). The continued dominance of the "quest for authenticity" as the primary motivating factor in the context of contemporary tourism inherently privileges the signs and symbols of authenticity with which Mercat legitimates its product, thereby strengthening its claim to such authority.

Significantly, however, the chapter also explored an important extended metaphor at work within the company's discourse – that of history as "a damned good story" which needs "damned good telling" – which encodes a very different view of history to that of the "just-the-facts" rhetoric elsewhere presented by its employees. I suggested that this

metaphor encodes a vision of history as consisting of "more than the sum of the available facts" and privileges "'emotive' and 'affinitive' knowledge" over and above factual accuracy (Handler and Gable 61; Crang 422). I explored a number of expressions of this latter view of history within the company's discourse, most notably the way in which it informs the very process by which its guides learn the history presented on their tours. The distinction between the two conceptualisations of history encoded in Mercat's rhetoric of authenticity as historical accuracy, on the one hand, and its characterisation of history as story, on the other, corresponds to Selwyn's distinction between "authenticity as knowledge," or "cool" authenticity, and "authenticity as feeling," or "hot" authenticity (quoted in Wang 48). I noted that, despite its employees' attempts to conflate these two types of authenticity, it often proves difficult to reconcile the view of history as story with the company's official rhetoric of authenticity as historical accuracy or "just the facts." This discussion of the multiple and conflicting meanings of history at work within the Mercat Tours discourse clearly reveals the inconsistencies, tensions and incongruities that exist within the company's ideology of authenticity.

A third and final conceptualisation of authenticity discussed in Chapter Two is authenticity as performance. I argued that this meaning of authenticity does not concern with the content of the company's tours but rather with its performance techniques. Again, considerable tensions and incongruities are at work within this last meaning of authenticity, as well as between the authenticities of historical accuracy and of performance as a whole. This tension is manifested in the company's struggle with the conflicting goals of producing an authentic performance which is nonetheless

entertaining for a paying audience. In this section I drew on journalist Peter Elson's distinction between two types of ghost tour performance: "straight ones relying on ghost stories, and theatrical walks with 'jump-outs' involving fake ghouls and props" (n.p.). Situating Mercat Tours firmly within the "straight" category, I identified those features which the company's own employees consider to represent an inauthentic ghost tour performance. These include the adoption of theatrical personae by guides, the use of props and special effects, and the employment of jumper-outers to accost the tour party unexpectedly at various points during the performance. As with authenticity as historical accuracy, I showed how the company uses a rhetoric of authenticity as performance to construct a dichotomy between its own performances and those of other companies which use such theatrical techniques.

Mercat's own performance aesthetic has its basis in a fundamental logocentrism according to which the success of the ghost tour performance lies in "the power of word to create the atmosphere" and to "get the imagination engaged into the story" (McBrierty, interview; Humphreys, interview). To the extent that the company's guides do perceive a persona for themselves, it is, accordingly, that of modern-day storytellers. As with the competing conceptualisations of history at work within the company's discourse, however, the reality is considerably more ambiguous than such rhetoric suggests. In practice, "the storyteller" represents just one pole of a spectrum consisting of three types of performance style which the company identifies among its own employees. Ironically, the style of those guides who position themselves towards opposite pole of this spectrum bears a close resemblance to the theatrical style of those other tour operators whose

performances are condemned within Mercat's official rhetoric as hopelessly inauthentic. By sanctioning the "middle-of-the-road" style as the ideal to which its employees should aspire, the company tacitly acknowledges the fact that at least some element of theatricality is essential to the production of a successful ghost tour.

Chapter Three built on the analysis presented in the previous chapter, examining the relationship between the "straight" and "fake" performance aesthetics in greater depth and from the opposite perspective. This chapter dealt with the discourse of a second Edinburgh-based ghost tour company, Witchery Tours, which exemplifies recent work on postmodern- or post-tourism. In this context, tourism has come to be seen as a playful "game" rather than a serious "quest." Again, the chapter began by tracing the literature on tourism as play, from the recognition that "the 'search for authenticity' is too simple a foundation for explaining contemporary tourism" to the identification of "an apparently pervasive shift in the dominant mode of experience desired by contemporary tourists" towards that of playfulness (Wang 46, quoting John Urry; Cohen, "Contemporary" 21). A number of key characteristics of postmodern tourism were identified, most notably its "concern with the enjoyability of the surface appearance of the attraction, rather than with its 'reality' or 'authenticity'" (Cohen, "Contemporary" 22). I also discussed the "destructuring [of] the boundaries between the copy and the original" which potentially enables "all attractions, 'natural' and 'contrived,' ... [to] co-exist within the same complex ... on an equal standing" (Wang 54; Cohen, "Contemporary" 16). Notwithstanding the scepticism of some critics towards the concept of the "post-tourist" (Feifer 259-68) and the continuing predominance of the quest for authenticity in the

context of heritage tourism, the case of Witchery Tours is proof that post-touristic forms are "currently evident and growing" and are increasingly becoming "culturally sanctioned" even within the heritage context (Rojek 178; Cohen, "Contemporary" 22).

As with the case of Mercat Tours, the analysis of the Witchery Tours discourse presented in Chapter Three was based around a single concept: that of light-heartedness. This manifests itself in a number of interrelated ways within the company's discourse and encapsulates the postmodern playfulness of its ethos. I identified four meanings of light-heartedness within the company's discourse and explored the ways in which each relates to some of the key themes and concepts within the literature on postmodern tourism. Firstly, then, light-heartedness signifies a much lesser concern with authenticity or historical accuracy than that which characterises the Mercat Tours discourse, to the extent that the style of the performance itself takes on a significance of its own, quite apart from its function as a vehicle for the communication of historical information. While history is of considerable importance to the company's employees, they exhibit a willingness to adapt their performance styles to the needs of individual audiences and to trust their audience members' ability to distinguish between "what is for real and what is fable" (Baxter, interview). Moreover, in one instance when a story was allegedly completely fabricated by the company for presentation on its tours, employees' discussions of this case revealed a distinctly postmodernistic delight in the inauthentic and the fake. Overall, then, this first meaning of light-heartedness within the Witchery Tours discourse exemplifies postmodern tourism's "aesthetic enjoyment of surfaces, whatever their cognitive status may be" (Cohen, "Contemporary" 21).

Secondly, light-heartedness relates to the overt theatricality of the company's performance aesthetic, to its espousal of the "actor identity" and to the general "celebration of fictive and dramaturgical values" in the context of its tours. These features are also prominent themes within postmodern culture (Snow 133; Rojek 134). Thus, whereas Mercat's employees place considerable emphasis on the importance of conducting tours "as oneself," Witchery's tours are all conducted in character and feature theatrical "gags and props" as well as "jumper-ooters" (Baxter, interview). The "visual, figurative sensibility" exhibited by Witchery Tours offers a particular contrast to the "linear, literary sensibility" of Mercat's performance aesthetic and illustrates another key characteristic of postmodern culture (Narváez 173).

This theatrical performance aesthetic also links to two further aspects of postmodernity. Firstly, it reflects the postmodern emphasis on "visual spectacle and play" (Urry 84), as exemplified in its use of the visual rhetoric of pastiche or collage. As in collage, the characters featured on the company's tours have been constructed out of fragments of texts with no apparent overarching meaning, so that the play of images becomes the point of the discourse itself. The performance space created on the company's tours is also an instance of what Dorst calls "postmodern vignette," involving the dissolution of the boundary between "inscription (image) and inscribed surface," or between discourse and story space (119). In the course of the tours, the characters move freely between discourse and story space and thereby "[enact] a vignetting of subjectivity itself" (Dorst 125). Secondly, the company's performance aesthetic links to the implosion of the imaginary and the real referred to by postmodern theorists as

hyperrealism. Its characters enact the way in which, in hyperrrealism, the representation becomes "more real than the real itself" (Storey 178), as exemplified in the appearances of Adam Lyal, the character who leads the company's "Murder & Mystery Tour," on real-life TV game shows and as a candidate in the 1999 Scottish Parliamentary elections.

Thirdly, the concept of light-heartedness relates to the generation of what Snow refers to as a "postmodern thrill" among participants on the company's tours (208). In contrast to the experience of recreational tourism, in which the tourist willingly suspends her disbelief and thereby becomes the "[accomplice] of the tourist establishment in the production of [her] own deception" (Cohen, "Phenomenology" 184), I argued that postmodern tourism operates by making such a suspension of disbelief difficult or impossible to sustain. It does so by focusing its audiences' attention away from its referential content towards the workings of the performance frame itself. Just as Snow observes in the case of the Plimoth Plantation living history site in Massachusetts, the thrill experienced by participants on Witchery's tours results from the "interplay of contradictory categories" at work within the performance situation itself, to the extent that at least some "have become more fascinated with [this] interplay ... than with the narrative delineation of ... history" itself (Snow 192-3).

Using Fife's concept of "semantic slippage," in this section of Chapter Three I discussed a number of techniques by means of which the company's guides engage in rendering the slippage inherent in their performances "too obviously and visibly 'wrong'" and in drawing their audiences' attention to the contradictory categories inherent in their performances. As Fife argues, touristic objects or enactments which operate in this way

"[belong] to a postmodernist form of tourism and [are] therefore not … about the modernist project of authenticity but rather about poking fun at the idea that such 'authenticity' is possible" (5). How audience members themselves collaborate in the construction and maintenance of this postmodern vignette adds weight to the concept of the post-tourist who recognises and appreciates irony and delights in "play[ing] at and with touring" (Ritzer and Liska 102).

The final section of Chapter Three explored a fourth meaning of light-heartedness at work within the Witchery Tours discourse. Here the concept refers to the way in which the company's tours are not, nor are they intended to be, genuinely fear-inducing. Company employees speak about the effects of their performances on their audiences – and particularly the activities of the "jumper-ooter" – using language associated with authenticity, contrasting the "frights" and "scares" generated on their own tours with experiences they perceive as "genuinely" frightening. This compares to Sabina Magliocco's work on the haunted house, in which, she argues, audience members' exaggerated reactions to their experience represent "an enactment or a parody of fear" rather than genuine terror (24). Witchery's guides use similar techniques to "hype" the audience and generate an atmosphere of excitement and anticipation during their tours to those used by employees of the haunted house. Like the haunted house, Witchery's performances operate as "a form of folk drama in which the audience collaborates with the performers in order to maintain an illusion" and whose "proper function … is not fulfilled unless all participants recognise it as fiction" (Magliocco 20; Ellis, "Mock-Ordeal" 487).

The arguments presented in this last section of the chapter formed a striking contrast to the ethos of the company whose discourse was analysed in Chapter Four. In my discussion of the discourse of this last company, I focused on a relatively unexplored area in tourism research. City of the Dead, which promises its audiences the experience of being "locked in a graveyard at night with an active poltergeist" (flier), utilises fear as a motivating factor to encourage participation on its tours. The chapter began by tracing the history of the Mackenzie Poltergeist phenomenon in Edinburgh's Greyfriars graveyard both prior to and following the establishment of the City of the Dead tour in 1999 and the growth of public fascination with the phenomenon. I examined the process of legend creation by which the company has constructed a dramatic and believable history of the Poltergeist phenomenon for presentation to its audiences, in its dealings with the media and to the public at large. It is a history that explains the Poltergeist's activities to its wide and varied audiences, yet maintains a sufficient degree of mystery around it to ensure its continuing status as an object of fascination and fear. This balance between "explanation" and "mystery" proves extremely successful in heightening the draw of the supernatural encounter which the company promises its audiences.

I also explored ways in which the resultant narrative has been dramatically altered over time according to the changing needs of the company and how it draws on and interconnects with a number of pre-existing local belief and legend traditions. In turn these lend an additional air of authenticity and believability to the Poltergeist story itself. I examined the jigsaw puzzle analogy used by company cofounder Jan Henderson to describe the way in which, in the process of (re)creating the narrative, he pieced together

fragments of information and interpretation all of which "seemed to fit" although they may or may not be true. Thus, within this process of legend creation, authenticity and believability take precedence over "the facts," which are frequently manipulated, changed or discarded as required.

The second part of the chapter explored the ostensive dimension of the Mackenzie Poltergeist story, that is, the way in which participants on the company's tours actively perform or enact the story. In the event that a Poltergeist "attack" actually occurs during a given tour, these narrative and performance frames collapse into each other, with participants literally acting out the legend. The experience of the teenage legend-trip much studied by folklorists closely compares to the City of the Dead tour. There are similarities both in terms of the structure and character of the event and the motivation of tour participants, which stems from the chance of an encounter with a genuine supernatural entity. This section of the chapter analysed the City of the Dead tour performance, paying particular attention to the many rhetorical and other performance techniques used by the company's guides in the course of the tour to build up excitement and fear amongst their audiences. These include their use of imagery of locks, keys and enclosures to create a paradoxical sense of privileged access and entrapment. I identified a parallel between such techniques and the process of "sight sacralization" as defined by MacCannell (Tourist 44-5). In particular, the "framing" and "enshrinement" stages of this process relate to the guides' placement of literal and symbolic boundaries around the Poltergeist in order to construct it as an object of simultaneous attraction and fear.

In contrast to the case of Witchery Tours, City of the Dead places considerably greater emphasis on the genuineness and potential harmfulness of the promised supernatural encounter. It thereby generates considerable uncertainty amongst audience members as to the status of their experience on the tour. Despite their close similarities, however, the City of the Dead tour differs from the legend-trip in that it is a commodified performance as part of which audience members pay for the chance of an encounter with the Mackenzie Poltergeist. This results not only in much more clearly marked distinctions between performer and audience members than is the case on the legend-trip, but also in a need to provide an entertaining experience which, it is perceived, "should provide one huge fright at least" (Henderson, interview). The chapter discussed the way in which the company's use of a jumper-outer at the climactic point of the tour raises important questions concerning the authenticity and credibility of the guides' discourse and calls into doubt the motivation behind their insistence on the genuineness of an encounter with the Poltergeist. However, I concluded by discussing an instance on a tour I attended when the guide's fear was certainly not part of his performance but suggested a genuine belief in and fear of the Poltergeist phenomenon. By the end of this particular tour, the event had been reframed as a "real" frightening experience rather than a game. Testimonials from audience members on various tours also suggest that despite their initial scepticism, their experience in the Black Mausoleum is often a genuinely terrifying one.

This thesis points to work that remains to be done in the investigation of the ghost tour as a genre of touristic performance with several specific areas of research holding

particular potential. Firstly, it is important to expand the comparative base. The present study has focused on just three tour operators, all located within a single city, incorporating only brief references to other ghost tour companies in Edinburgh and beyond. The wealth of material collected from these three companies alone suggests the potential fruitfulness of comparative research conducted with ghost tours in other locations, or indeed with other operators in Edinburgh itself. Tours based in cities (such as Edinburgh, York, London and New Orleans) where several companies compete for a share of the ghost tour market could be compared to sole proprietors (as in St John's, St Andrews and Stirling). There is also a need for wider investigation of more general trends in this type of tourism. "Dark tourism" is becoming increasingly popular and ghost tours represent just one example. As well, entertainment, rather than remembrance or education, is a growing motivation for visiting such sites.

Secondly, while this thesis has purposely based its arguments on evidence drawn from the wide range of forms and types of communication generated by each company, more close analyses are needed of the tour performances themselves, similar to the analysis of the City of the Dead tour presented in the second section of Chapter Four. In the case of City of the Dead, for example, attending and recording larger numbers of tours would enable an investigation into the effects of a Poltergeist "attack" on the nature of the performance and on the attitudes of tour participants, as compared to those occasions on which no attack takes place. There is also considerable potential in a study tracing the history and development of the narratives told by ghost tour guides and comparing their performance on the tours to how they appear in other contexts. This

would allow further insights into "the fine borderline between story as a piece of folklore and story as a 'product', a commodity" (Kauppi 1).

Thirdly, while the present study has focused primarily on the producers of this particular touristic experience (the guides and management of the ghost tour companies themselves), considerable research potential lies in the perspective of its consumers, or audience members. Possible methodologies include conducting questionnaires or surveys of tour participants and even semi-structured interviews, something which was attempted to a limited extent during the field research for the present study. It should be noted, however, that any investigation into this topic would in all likelihood be constrained by the transience of the tour party and the resultant difficulties in securing the participation of audience members. It would also be difficult to avoid influencing the event itself by announcing the researcher's presence at the start of the tour.

Another possible area for research would involve the immersion of the researcher into the corporate culture of the ghost tour company under investigation. In order to gain a fuller understanding of the way in which guides are enculturated into each company's "ethos" and trained to deliver the messages encoded in its performance aesthetic, the researcher would ideally undergo the company's training process herself and spend a period of employment as a guide with that company, similar to the process undergone by Snow in his work at Plimoth Plantation.

Lastly, there is considerable potential in a longitudinal study examining the development of individual tour companies' aesthetics over time. For example, since the time of my own field research, Mercat Tours has increasingly involved itself in special

events and performances which require its guides to perform "in character," in stark contrast to its previously stated commitment to conducting all its tours "as oneself." This suggests that the ambiguity in the company's attitude towards the actor identity is evolving into a more overt acceptance of theatrical performance techniques and may be indicative of a general shift towards a postmodern touristic ethos. Work could also be undertaken in company archives, including old fliers, advertisements, training manuals and other internal documents, as well as coverage of the company's past activities in the media, in order to trace the evolution of its ethos over time. All directions promise to hold exciting insights for further researchers and to expand our understanding of the complex interconnections between traditional and tourism cultures.

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