

The Influence of Place on the Artistic Imagination





Author Marie Hulme



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Sacred Heart University Irish Studies in collaboration with SCMA presented

“The Influence of Place on the Artistic Imagination”

as part of a week of events focusing on
Tradition and Complexity: A Week of Art, Music, Literature, and Scholarship

Sponsored by Sacred Heart University Irish Studies, The Department of Art and Design, The Human Journey Colloquium Series, the School of Communications, Media & the Arts (SCMA),
The Hersher Institute for Ethics, Languages and Literature, and Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies

Brigid's Peace

A Novel by Marie Hulme

Set in Belfast, Northern Ireland during the time known as “The Troubles,” *Brigid's Peace* tells the story of a former female Irish Republican Army (I.R.A.) assassin who must reconcile herself with events and people from a fractured past, when her mother's failing health necessitates her return home from exile in the South, where she has lived quietly as an artist for ten years.

Brigid must come to terms with her own violent past and reconcile that with her current views which are no longer as simple as her once more distinctly sectarian bias. She must decide if she will get pulled back into the violence to finally avenge her youngest sisters' deaths, fifteen years earlier, or to turn away from it forever. Her younger sister, Grace, who is becoming drawn into the Republican movement, plays a role in Brigid's transformation, as does her estranged father whose own violent past set into motion a generational cycle of violence, despair, and trauma.

The novel examines the need for luminosity, for transcendence, for beauty in the face of evil and as a path towards the divine. It considers how the creative process itself offers a place of reconciliation of seemingly irreconcilable opposites, as well as a path for forgiveness of self and others.





Professor Marie Hulme, reads from her book, *Brigid's Peace*, to a packed audience.



The Troubles - Belfast



Dingle Peninsula



Belfast

Brigid's innate impulse towards beauty and creation, as expressed through her painting, is often in tension with outward pressures encouraging ugliness and destruction because of her affiliation with the I.R.A. The triumph of the creative instinct, however, is in recognizing the importance of opposites in creation, the generative, fallen world of birth and death. It is why I chose to begin the novel with the juxtaposition of seeming contraries – a first and last breath – and placed them in the context of a holy, sacred, profound movement from one life into the next. (Hulme)



Belfast



Dingle Peninsula



Belfast



Dingle Peninsula

Brigid's Peace is my attempt to answer lingering questions I have about the children I met during a visit to Belfast as a young girl at the start of "The Troubles." I've wondered if they had been victims of violence or perpetrators of it. I've wondered if their religious rituals, bred into them on both sides of the sectarian divide, served to comfort them or to enslave them. This novel reflects the questions of my own heart and soul to do with the mysteries of love and faith, as well as the role of art in the noble search for understanding them. (Hulme)



Dingle Peninsula



Belfast

Dingle Peninsula



"Cathair a Bhoghasin" is a stone fort that was originally the home of a Gaelic noble. "Cathair a Bhoghasin" translates as 'fort of the rings' or possibly 'fort of the rainbow'. It has been standing in the remote part of the peninsular for more than 1000 years.



Many in the audience said they found the presentation insightful and inspiring.



Members in the audience participated in the discussion.

One cannot be in the presence of a work of art, a thing of beauty, and not be transformed. Brigid considers those who, from "the other side" of the sectarian divide, she shares an aesthetic sensibility that transcends sectarian differences. "Brigid thought of all the murals she had painted. Belfast's walls were a visual history of hatred and violence rendered by artists like her and whomever her Protestant counterpart was on the other side. Someone, like her, who saw life through the lens of color and texture and form, and yet hated her because of her name, her school, the faith she no longer embraced" (Hulme, 35).




Built to separate two communities from each other for safety reasons, ultimately the wall continues to reinforce the city's entrenched sectarian divisions. Originally low in number, they have multiplied over the years, from 10 in the early 1990s to 45 today, in total they stretch over 21 miles (34 kms) and have increased in both height and number since the Good Friday Agreement of 1998.

PEACE WALLS BELFAST



Dingle Peninsula

Dingle Peninsula

A young child with curly hair, seen from behind, stands on a rocky ledge overlooking a waterfall. The child is looking down at the water. The waterfall is cascading over dark, craggy rocks. The surrounding area is rocky with some sparse grass and moss. The scene is set on a cliffside.

**God doesn't need to come down upon
the mountain, for the mountain itself is
the revelation. We only have to look at
it and we will know how we should live.
- John Moriarty**



After Professor Hulme read from her book, *Brigid's Peace*, a discussion followed with Professors Nathan Lewis and Richard Falco about the influence of place on the artistic imagination.



Professor Richard Falco organized and created the exhibition of photographs for Marie's presentation. The photographs were taken by him and a colleague, Mariusz Smiejek. In addition to teaching at Sacred Heart University, Mr. Falco is also the President of Vision Project. Vision Project is an organization dedicated to the development of investigative journalism, documentary photography, film/multimedia, and education.



Professor Nathan Lewis contributed several watercolors to the exhibition that he produced in Ireland.
Professor Lewis is also the Chair of the Art & Design Department at Sacred Heart University.

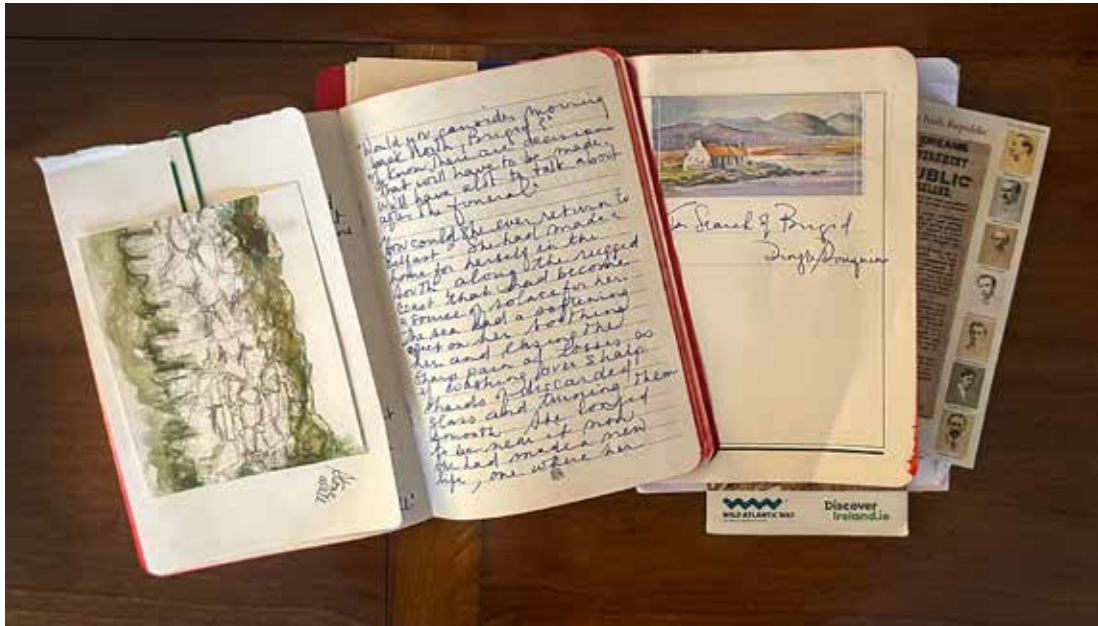


In *Brigid's Peace*, the community is brought together over ritual and objects rich in sacramental allusion. For Northern Irish Catholics, in particular, there was a need to rely on ritual to reinforce tribal connections and loyalties. In an early scene of the novel, Brigid observes three neighbors caring for her mother's body, performing the ritual of bathing the body in preparation for burial. It is a deeply intimate, highly symbolic act that recalls baptism and the hope for the dead entering a new life, being born into a new world: "The women continued gently washing their friend, as if caring for a newborn, dipping their clothes in and out of the bowl with a reverence. There was a rhythmic pattern to the plunging and wringing out of the cloths, filling the room with a familiar sound of ordinary life that Brigid welcomed and was comforted by after a long night had passed with nothing more than the sound of her mother's fading breath and then empty silence. They were sprinkling water on their friend, made holy by their love and devotion" (Hulme, 4).



Dingle Peninsula

I am interested in the idea of art as a path towards redemption and the divine and I've thought about my character's continued return to her pure, white, unblemished, full of unrealized possibility, canvas. "It was only when she was painting that Brigid lost herself in that immediate moment, present only to form, texture, color. It was the act of choosing which shade of green to best capture a rural Irish hillside, or which brush would yield the desired stroke, that her mind and heart were arrested by the present enough to forget the past" (Hulme, 72).



Several of Marie's research notebooks, prints, and clippings for her book.

Marie McStocker-Hulme is a lecturer in Literature and Creative Writing at Sacred Heart University in Fairfield, Connecticut. She received a B.A. in English from Smith College, an M.A. in British and American Literature from New York University, an M.A. in Teaching from Sacred Heart University, and an M.F.A. in Creative Writing from Fairfield University. Before her life as an academic, she worked as a journalist for ABC News in London.

Her award-winning non-fiction vignettes, *Love Letters to London*, are about her time living there as a young woman. Her short story "Special Romantics" was the third-place national short story winner in the Hackney Literary Awards and was published in the *Birmingham Arts Journal*. Marie's novel, *Brigid's Peace*, set in her ancestral home of Ireland, explores the need for forgiveness of self and others in breaking the cycle of generational trauma. *Brigid's Peace* was awarded first-prize in the novel excerpt category of the Keats Soul-Making Literary Awards Pen Women Chapter in San Francisco and was a finalist in the Tucson Festival of Books Literary Awards novel-excerpt category.



Marie at St. Brigid's Well in Ireland.

Path

by Ceaití Ní Bheildiúin

How many feet must tread to bare for us a path?

Your ghostly footsteps
race ahead of me
in an intimate dance
of sole and soil.
I feel the ancient rhythm
of my race urging me on.

Bare, mishapen feet,
swift, lame, slim feet,
straight, left, fairy feet,
black feet, female feet,
light, clean, dancing feet.
weak feet, king's feet,
dry, heavy, tired feet,
swollen, tightly bound feet.

I pass every trace of them,
restoring myself
on this customary way
My feet remember
recover their music
Time and antiquity merge
in our tribal unconscious.
I reach for the cap of wisdom
tossed aloft by the poets
for those who followed,
conjure their protection
out of the mist.

Lured by your old music,
I step out humbly, ably,
on my predestined pilgrimage,
Like a whirling dervish,
it inhabits my brain.
My head spins
round and round
in Cathair Deargáin.

The ground addresses me
in short intense phrases,
in sweeping, seductive lines
ghost-whispered by hags of the Com.
The path speaks to my feet,
the stone speaks to my hands,
to my heart, my memories, my bones.

From the folklore-rich clay
I devour history, stories,
myth and magic.
When the Fenian horn sounds
in Páirc na Groí,
my heart contracts,
my senses dance.

I set out for the mountain.
Its Paradise up there. Heaven lies
just beyond the clouds that rim its peak.
The Sky God, Daghada belongs there;
Crom Dubh's head rests there;
there too, the holy soul
of boatman Brendan lives on.
I follow the path worn by so many feet
and every horizon melts before me.