Displaced from the Sacred Sites: David Foster’s In the New Country and The Land Where Stories End
Abstract

David Foster’s novels consistently interpret Australia as ‘colonial’, with its white settlers denied any spiritual connection with the natural environment, and its indigenous people displaced and damaged by white settlement. (1981) follows the displacement of indigenous people from the outlying islands of Scotland to become the settlers of a colony like Australia, and in turn displace the Aborigines. proposes a radical new religion, based on the castration rites of the ancient world, that might overcome white Australians’ alienation from the land with a new commitment to the environment. But Foster’s most recent novels suggest a loss of hope in Australia, as offers a farcical parody of , and seeks spiritual consolation in a fairytale set in seventh-century Ireland, that recalls the sacred sites of the Scottish islanders in . This article examines these two novels as the impossible search of a ‘colonial mongrel’ for a sacred place, in Ireland or Australia, and the signs that such a place may belong in a lost time, only accessible through writing. In Foster’s novels writing is the last resort for the sacred, in a world engulfed by a global economic imperialism.

Keywords

David Foster; spirituality; sacred sites; Irish spiritualism

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O’Connor’s underappreciated story “The Displaced Person” is a valuable read given the country’s increasing xenophobia. The Matysiaks were not a complete anomaly. The pastor of Sacred Heart, Father John Toomey, had worked through the Catholic Resettlement Commission, an international organization created by Pope Pius XII, to help other refugee families settle in the area. But O’Connor, who didn’t like to travel much because of her lupus, drew her inspiration from those who were closest to her—and so the Matysiaks, having settled almost literally in her backyard, captured her imagination. He had lived in New York and had an aunt closely connected to Dorothy Day and the Catholic Worker, which is how O’Connor came to subscribe to their magazine. In an age where land has become a commodity for development or extraction, the need to claim, protect, and celebrate sacred sites is more important than ever. Luckily we have the wisdom of indigenous elders to guide us back to this important and sacred connection to all things. For those of us who have been displaced for generations from our homeland, those who live in crowded cities, as well as those who are fortunate enough to live on the same land their ancestors walked upon, sacred sites are vital to our well-being. This powerful connection between humans and the land that sustains our lives is also easy to forget in our busy lives. This is why it is so important to take a moment to stop, breathe, and remember. The place where your grandparents and their parents once prayed. The stories of the landscape of the Black Hills belong to the people who interpret its sacredness. In her article Mirror of Heaven: Cross-Cultural Transference of the Sacred Geography of the Black Hills, Linea Sundstrom traces the indigenous history of the land with regard to various tribes’ spiritual connection to it. She writes, “Recorded history suggests a complicated series of movements into and out of the Black Hills by various peoples” (178), but, she argues, the landscape maintained its sacred character since incumbent tribes adopted traditions from their predecessors: “As one group rep