

## Thin Places: A Natural History of Healing and Home

**Kerri ní Dochartaigh**

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About a place, a past, and an imperiled future, Kerri ní Dochartaigh's poetic memoir *Thin Places* looks back on what it means to have survived the Troubles in Ireland.

Ní Dochartaigh, who was born in 1983 at a midway point in the Troubles, recalls a childhood of simultaneous blessings, in the form of Ireland's culture and natural wonder, and traumas: her home was riven by Catholic and Protestant struggles; her family's house was bombed out when she was eight. With her mother and brothers, she was forced to move from one imperiled section of Derry to the next; she was subjected to hateful words, the constant threat of violence, and horrific images that would not abate. She found solace in bugs, and butterfly wings, and the stories that her grandfather told.

Constructed like a widening gyre—moving from images of Irish coast that vibrate with wild promises, into a narrative center that's thick with pain and desire, and then broadening back out to consider all that the island encompasses, now and via its memories—this raw and affecting work confronts a complicated inheritance with both grief and hope. It wanders to places where the keening of past ages “still vibrates like a dirge .... still echoes above the gorse like a tolling omen, a mourners' hymn ... [I]ike a pealing lament born of stone, born of tears.” It remembers those who were lost with tenderness and regret. Even yet, it reaches out: to hope for peace, despite the frictions reignited by Brexit; to preserve wild spaces, despite the blinking out of species; and to resurrect silenced Gaelic terms, which remain the best way to understand complicated, lovely Irish spaces.

With grace and a keen sense of history and the natural world, the memoir *Thin Places* pays complicated tribute to a troubled place and time.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (March / April 2022)

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